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“THE COMING EVENT!”

JOHN DUNMORE LANG’S VISION FOR AN INDEPENDENT AUSTRALIA

ABSTRACT John Dunmore Lang, the Scottish Presbyterian clergyman who settled in Sydney in 1823, until his death in 1878 played an important role in the religious, political and cultural life of New South Wales and helped to create two new colonies: Victoria and Queensland. His writings as much as his political and educational activities significantly contributed to the rise of early Australian nationalism. Lang envisaged a great future of a federal Australian republic – the United Provinces of Australia. Drawing on Lang’s books, pamphlets and his articles and speeches published in the colonial and metropolitan press, this paper analyses the religious, ideological, political and economic ideas that led him to present and espouse the cause of the *future America of the Southern Hemisphere*. The focus is on the fundamental political and social principles on which Lang wanted to establish the independent Australian nation. The paper also discusses planned political institutions, as well as expected or desired social and economic characteristics.

Key words: John Dunmore Lang, Australian nationalism, colonial politics in NSW

Australia! land of hope!
Thy sons shall bear thee up
Even to the skies!
And Earth's exalted ones
Shall hail thee from their thrones,
Queen of the Southern Zones.
Australia, rise!
 J.D. Lang, *Australian Anthem*, 1826¹

In 1851 the short-lived Sydney newspaper *The Press* published two parts of an imaginary report allegedly written by a certain Jabaz Porterfield in 1871 and printed in the *Bengal Harkaru* in Calcutta. On his voyage to Australia, Porterfield visited Flinderston, a seaport of the Gulf of Carpentaria, which he described as *full of vessels loading for London and Liverpool*. The cargo included wool, and a great quantity of cotton, sugar, coffee and tobacco. Wool was an important export article, but no longer the principal one, as it was superseded by increased exports of cotton. Porterfield's next visit was to Mitchellton, at the mouth of the Albert River in the Gulf of Carpentaria, opposite Sweers Island. Porterfield described Mitchellton as *rapidly increasing and promising to be one of the largest and most important commercial cities in Australia*. Of its 30,000 inhabitants *about a third consist of natives of the Eastern Archipelago, thousands of whom are now flocking to all the northern cities of Australia in the quest for employment*. From Mitchellton, Porterfield travelled by rail to another key port, Hereweare, on the Pacific coast which he noted as *a centre of extensive coasting trade, as well as of considerable and rapidly increasing foreign commerce*. During Porterfield's travels to Australia no experience impressed upon him more than the revolutionary change in the perception of distance. He observed coach-drivers impatiently rushing passengers aboard while calling out their destinations: *The Gulf! Singapore! London!* For Porterfield this was *a complete annihilation of space*.²

Porterfield's impressions of Australia constitute a wider visualisation of its future. Seen from this perspective, in 1871 the continent was already well developed and populated, liberated from the so-called 'tyranny of distance' and closely connected to the world economy. Porterfield perceived its inhabitants were enjoying an advanced political and social system. He voyaged further south and reached Sydney. With 250,000 inhabitants, Sydney impressed him as *really a splendid city, worthy in every respect of its noble destiny as the metropolitan city, not only of all Australia, but of the southern hemisphere*. However, at the time of the Porterfield's fictional visit, Sydney was merely

¹ J.D. Lang, *Aurora Australis or Specimens of Sacred Poetry for the Colonists of Australia*, Sydney 1826, p. 147, at <<http://adc.library.usyd.edu.au/data-2/v00024.pdf>>, 22 February 2018.

² J. Porterfield, "Australia Twenty Years Hence. From *The Bengal Hurakaru* of May 1, 1871. Hereweare, Leichartsland, Australia, March 15, 1871", *The Press*, no. 26, 25 June 1851, pp. 298-299.

the capital of the Seven United Provinces of Australia. This federal state encompassed, along with New South Wales, Van Diemen's Land, South Australia and Victoria, the territories of present-day Queensland, then divided into three provinces – Flindersland, Leihartslund and Cookslund. Each province had its own bicameral legislature and a governor, which in New South Wales was situated in Parramatta. Federal authorities consisted of the House of Representatives, elected on the basis of population, and the Senate, where each province was represented by five senators, so that every province had equal political weight in the Upper Chamber. The federal government was administered by a president elected for four years, as the Australia visited by Porterfield in 1871 was a republic. While negotiating for Australian independence Prince Albert alluded to the possibility of the formation of a kingdom for his second son; it was explained to him that *Royalty was too tender a plant to grow in Australia – the climate was too dry*. With its republican government Australia was developing much better than before the Treaty of Independence. In the old days, overseas public opinion associated Australia at best with the discovery of gold, more often with the *men from Botany Bay*, [...] *but now the Australian Ambassador takes his place in Paris, in Washington, and in St. Petersburg, as well as in London, with the Representatives of the oldest Courts in Europe*.³

Porterfield loved the Australian flag.

*It is a kangaroo on a blue ground, surmounted by seven stars, for the Seven Provinces. I am glad they have no stripes. I never liked them: they have an air of essential vulgarity about them to my eye, reminding one of the piece of the window-curtain or bed-tick, and suggesting the idea of negro slavery and flogging, of which, of course, there is nothing here.*⁴

Since the Treaty of Independence, close and friendly cooperation had been developing between Australia and Britain. Trade relations had doubled and emigration from the UK increased immensely with mutual benefit as the Australian republic acutely needed the Anglo-Saxon people and the "Old Country" needed a destination for its redundant population. Large-scale settlement in Australia was conducted jointly with the British Government and co-financed by an effectively managed system of sales of wasteland in the Australian Provinces. This attracted to the Antipodes a stream of migrants who had previously chosen America. Porterfield claimed that because of Australian independence combined with friendly cooperation with London *you meet with none of that nasty jealousy and hatred of Britain and her institutions here, which are often so offensively exhibited even among people of middle classes in America*. He was sure that *if Britain were falling into the mud, these people [Australians] would be the first to lend her a helping hand*.⁵

The above prophetic account under the pseudonym "Porterfield" was of none other than Reverend John Dunmore Lang in 1851, articulating his main ideas for Australia's development. The following year he expanded on this account and presented it in

³ Idem, "Australia Twenty Years Hence. Sydney, NSW, 1st April, 1871", *The Press*, no. 27, 2 July 1851, p. 309.

⁴ Idem, "Australia... March 15, 1871", p. 299.

⁵ Ibid.

a more systematic way in the third edition of *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales*.⁶ Lang's views on the subject can be located in his numerous other writings. Some of his political and ideological concepts concerning the future of Australia, such as republicanism and independence from the empire, have been extensively discussed, whereas others have attracted less attention or have been hardly mentioned. Drawing on a variety of his opinions expressed in many monographs, pamphlets, public speeches and press, this article examines and reappraises those texts which serve to reconstruct Lang's evolving vision of Australia's future.

Lang was the founder of the Scots Church in Sydney, where he ministered for over half a century, as well as a prolific author, educationalist and active politician. When he landed in Sydney in 1823, aged 24, the mainland part of New South Wales numbered fewer than 30,000 settlers. According to the 1881 population census, taken three years after his death, 751,000 inhabitants of non-Aboriginal descent lived in New South Wales (221,000 in Sydney alone) and 2,253,000 in all British colonies in Australia.⁷ Also, some of these colonies, including the most populated one, Victoria, were formed as a result of their separation from New South Wales. Meanwhile a predominantly penal settlement in New South Wales was developing into a self-governing, dynamic civil society, undergoing fundamental political, social, economic and cultural changes. Along with the growth of identification with a community in each colony, there were visible signs of a distinct Australian identity appearing, as well as the first indications of an Australian national consciousness.

Lang played a significant role in these developments. As one author put it, *there is perhaps no other individual man in our history, a study of whose life and work would illustrate and illuminate the story of the growth of Australian society and sentiment*.⁸ During his numerous journeys to Britain and in his capacity as a Presbyterian clergyman, the author of many books and pamphlets and contributor to the British and Sydney press, including his own newspapers, and member of the Legislative Council, he promoted and even organized the recruitment of immigrants from the United Kingdom, preferably artisans and skilled workers of respectable Protestant families. However, his activities in this field brought mixed results and at considerable personal cost, including setbacks to his financial and public standing. Lang, being an ardent supporter of a decentralized government based on the American model, was instrumental in the separation of Victoria and Queensland from the Mother Colony. He promoted education,

⁶ J. Lang, *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales, Including a Visit to the Gold Regions*, London 1852, pp. 550-565, at <https://books.google.pl/books?id=OXcxAQAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=.+Lang,+An+historical+and+statistical+account+of+New+South+Wales,+including+a+visit+to+the+gold+regions,&hl=pl&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwks__QzbnZAhWG2SwKHTcrAQoQ6AEIjzAA#v=onepage&q=.%20Lang%2C%20An%20historical%20and%20statistical%20account%20of%20New%20South%20Wales%2C%20including%20a%20visit%20to%20the%20gold%20regions%2C&f=false>, 22 February 2018.

⁷ W. Vamplew, *Australians. Historical statistics*, Broadway, NSW 1987, pp. 25, 33, 41.

⁸ C.W. Salier, "The Australian Ideals of John Dunmore Lang", *The Australian Quarterly*, no. 4 (1938), p. 70.

establishing a primary school and a secondary school – the Australian College. In later years he campaigned for national secular education and the abolition of state aid for religion. Involved in the anti-transportation movement, which was opposed to bringing convicts into Australian colonies, Lang took an active part in the political struggle for the introduction of a responsible and democratic government in New South Wales, and in the newly formed colonies of Victoria and Queensland. As his political radicalism grew, he made a determined stand against the squattocracy, their political influence, economic interests and attempts to thwart democratisation. This activity gained him large electoral support and popularity among the lower and lower-middle strata of colonial society. Nevertheless, Lang failed to mobilize any considerable backing for what became his main contribution to the history of nineteenth-century Australia – his relentless pursuit of an independent and federal Australian republic, with voting rights for all men.⁹

It is in this context that this paper analyses Lang's vision of the future of Australia, its theoretical and practical sources as well as its main components. Not only did he draw on his political and social convictions, but also sought inspiration from his religious beliefs, from overseas examples and from contemporary political discourse. Among the political thinkers who influenced him were Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Alexis de Tocqueville and Edmund Burke. Nevertheless, it was his involvement first in the day-to-day ecclesiastical, political and social life of NSW and later of other colonies which shaped his general outlook and particular attitudes regarding the future of his adopted country.

There were two fundamental points of reference in Lang's visionary image of the Australian future: the United Kingdom and the United States. The former, as already seen, was treated with some ambivalence. On the one hand, Britain was perceived by Lang as the source and the basis of Australian political freedoms as well as certain institutions and social patterns. In his many writings, British Anglo-Saxon Protestant heritage and political liberties, such as taxation by representation, were held up and overtly recommended by Lang as a model for the Australian polity, and even advanced as arguments at first for self-government and then for independence. More often, however, British political patterns and values were implicitly assumed as "natural" and "universal". On the other hand, since the beginning of the 1840s, as a result of London's failed attempts to renew transportation of convicts to New South Wales, Lang increasingly presented the British Empire, its officialdom and its governors in the colony as the main obstacles on the road to independence and prosperity. This point was made abundantly clear in Lang's secret sketches of unpublished revolutionary manifestoes written

⁹ D.W.A. Baker, *Days of Wrath. A Life of John Dunmore Lang*, Carlton, Vic 1985; idem, "Lang, John Dunmore (1799-1878)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Canberra, at <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lang-john-dunmore-2326/text2953>>, published first in hard-copy 1967, 22 February 2018; A. Gilchrist, G. Powell (eds.), *John Dunmore Lang. Australia's Pioneer Republican*, Wantira, Vic 1999; J.D. Lang, *John Dunmore Lang, Chiefly Autobiographical 1799 to 1878, Cleric, Writer, Traveller, Statesman, Pioneer of Democracy in Australia: An Assembling of Contemporary Documents*, compiled and edited by A. Gilchrist, Melbourne 1951. Vol. 1-2.

in 1845 and 1855. The first manifesto began with: *The galling and degrading yoke under which we have so long groaned as a British colony governed by absolute Secretaries of State and tyrannical Governors, is broken at last. The government of Sir George Gipps and his satellites is at an end.*¹⁰ The same sentiments were expressed in a fictional story of an anti-British uprising that Lang noted in 1845 and kept among his private papers. Its plot was very encouraging for those who sought separation from London. Governor Gipps was expelled, and when British soldiers, convicts and pastoralists joined native patriotic revolutionaries, the democratic and independent Republic of the States of New Britain was bloodlessly won, supported by the United States.¹¹ In speeches to the Legislative Council as early as 1843, Lang criticised the British colonial rule in Australia, and Governor Gipps in particular, as *the agent of a despotic authority*.¹² Although he usually rejected violence as a means of achieving independence, in this statement and in some others he predicted that London's policy would lead to the alienation of the local population and might provoke a violent insurrection.¹³ He expressed similar opinions in his monographs¹⁴ and in newspapers.¹⁵

Towards the end of his sixth stay in Britain in his letters to *The British Banner*, Lang did not hesitate to compare the United Kingdom to absolute monarchies and threaten it with an upcoming colonial revolt. If British politicians wished the Australian Colonies *to be bound to the mother country by the tie of force, like Poland to Russia, and Hungary to Austria, and Rome to the Pope, I would beg to remind them that, in the single colony of New South Wales, there is land, and sheep, and cattle enough to enable any bold enterprising individual who, in these revolutionary times, might be tempted to seize the reins of government and raise the standard of freedom and independence – to buy off 20,000 of Her Majesty's best troops.*¹⁶

¹⁰ D. Headon, E. Perkins (eds.), *Our First Republicans. John Dunmore Lang, Charles Harpur, Daniel Henry Deniehy. Selected writings 1840-1860*, Annandale, NSW, 1998, pp. 11, 55-6.

¹¹ C. Blackton, "The Dawn of Australian National Feeling, 1850-1856", *Pacific Historical Review*, no. 2 (1955), p. 125.

¹² Legislative Council. Tuesday, October 31, 1843. Parliament of NSW, *Hansard. Reports of Parliamentary Debates. Sydney Morning Herald* extracts from the proceedings, at <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/dtdocs/DTDocuments/1843/11011843.pdf>>, 22 February 2018.

¹³ *Ibid.*; see also J. Lang, *A Letter to the Constituency of New South Wales to Which is Subjoined, The Substance of a Speech Delivered in the Legislative Council... 31st October, 1843, in the Resumed Debate on the Governor's Message on the Judicial Estimates*, Sydney 1843, p. 16, reprinted in: D. Headon, E. Perkins (eds.), *Our First...*, pp. 8-10.

¹⁴ J.D. Lang, *An Historical...*, p. 561.

¹⁵ "Our Rights – and We Will Have Them", *Colonial Observer*, vol. 1, no. 4, 28 October 1841, at <<http://www.nla.gov.au/ferguson/1327662X/18411028/00010004/1-8.pdf>>, 22 February 2018; "The Public Meeting", *Colonial Observer*, vol. 1, no. 20, 16 February 1842, at <<http://www.nla.gov.au/ferguson/1327662X/18420216/00010020/1-8.pdf>>, 22 February 2018; J.D. Lang, "Critical Condition of the Colony of New South Wales", *Atlas*, vol. 1, no. 34, 19 July 1845, pp. 398-399, at <<http://www.nla.gov.au/ferguson/1440365x/18450719/00010034/3-4.pdf>>, 22 February 2018.

¹⁶ J.D. Lang, "Australian Colonization. What Remains to Be Done for It, both at Home and Abroad", *The British Banner*, 12 September 1849, no. 41, quote from: "Letters of Dr. John Dunmore Lang in *The British Banner*. These were copied from an old book of Caroline Chisholm's press cuttings which

In Lang's opinion, given such British policy it was no wonder that *sooner or later, some such personage as the President of the United States of Australia will start into sudden existence and surprise the world with his goodly port and demeanour. He will require no soldiers to enable him to keep his seat, like Louis Napoleon; he will have no foul blot of slavery on his national escutcheon, like Zachary Taylor.*¹⁷

In a letter penned to Secretary of State for the Colonies Earl Grey, Lang called him the *Autocrat of all the Russias* of our Colonial Empire and claimed that concessions that would have satisfied colonists in New South Wales three years previously were now bound to be turned down. Again, he evoked the figure of the Australian President, who *would take his place in the great family of nations, with a proud consciousness of the brilliant career upon which his country has entered when delivered at length from the baleful domination of Downing Street.*¹⁸

Lang's ambivalence towards the United Kingdom is well summarized in the conclusion of his first lecture given in the City Theatre in Sydney in April 1850, as preparation for the formation of the Australian League, aimed at independence from Britain. At that meeting he pronounced: *We love with the utmost fervour of affection our mother-country, our father-land, and we detest from the very soul the bare idea of annexation to any other country, to any other land... But we do earnestly desire our freedom and national independence, both as being our birthright as men and Britons, and as being indispensably necessary to enable us to realise the glorious future that awaits our adopted land.*¹⁹

The United States was for Lang another, increasingly important, source of inspiration and a reservoir of political and social models and solutions fit for Australian conditions. His visit to America in 1840 was a watershed in his political evolution from Tory sympathizer to democrat and republican. When he arrived in the United States, he declared the reason for his visit was to learn about American life and gain assistance for the advancement of *the future America of the Southern Hemisphere*. He expected it to be *evident to every intelligent American* that the advancement of the Australian colonies would exceed all former precedents and *at no distant day* they would *exert a mighty influence, either for good or for evil, on the large portion of the whole family of man.*²⁰ The American example, including historical events that had led to the formation of the

was lent to me by the late E. Dwyer-Gray, Treasurer of Tasmania... Margaret Kiddle, October, 1953", pp. 2-21, at <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-52797571>>, 22 February 2018.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ J.D. Lang, "To the Right Honourable Earl Grey, Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies", *The British Banner*, 21 November 1849 quote from: "Letters...", p. 36; see also "Earl Grey's Reply to Dr. Lang's Charges", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 July 1850, p. 3, at <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12919178?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FS%2Ftitle%2F35%2F1850%2F07%2F03%2Fpage%2F1511978%2Farticle%2F12919178>>, 22 February 2018.

¹⁹ J.D. Lang, *The Coming Event; or the United Provinces of Australia. Two Lectures Delivered in the City Theatre and School of Arts...*, Sydney, 1850, reprinted in: D. Headon, E. Perkins (eds.), *Our First...*, p. 21.

²⁰ Idem, *The Moral and Religious Aspects of the Future America of the Southern Hemisphere*, New York, 1840, reprinted in: Headon, D. Perkins E. (eds). *Our First...*, p. 3.

United States, was extensively used in his major work *Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia* (1852), its modified version *The Coming Event! Or Freedom and Independence for the Seven United Provinces of Australia* (1870), and many other publications with a view to show and substantiate the best possible political and social solutions for Australia. Of course, there were stains on the American picture, most notably slavery, which Lang described in 1840 as *the dark spot in the national banner; the source alike of present weakness and future calamities*.²¹ Later he wanted to combat it in what he considered a realistic way, by using free white labour for the production of cotton on a massive scale in Queensland.²²

The American model served one more purpose. It proved that a republican form of government succeeded there *beyond all expectations*.²³ In order to dissociate it from Chartism, Communism and Socialism, Lang traced it back to Puritan settlers in Connecticut in the 1630s and their constitution. He also insisted that as in the case of ancient Athens and – as he expected – in a near future in the Brazilian Empire, popular freedom in the republican form linked with national independence would have a salutary influence on the development of national spirit and virtues. His main argument was anchored in the Bible. He found in the books of the Old Testament *three grand fundamental principles of Republican government – Universal Suffrage, Perfect Political Equality, and Popular Election – in full operation, under the Divine sanction and appointment in the commonwealth of ancient Israel*. In the history of God's own people monarchy prevailed for long periods by *Divine permission, as many things else do in this lower world, that are certainly not of Divine appointment; but Republicanism existed from the first by Divine appointment*. He argued that the morals of Israel under the Judges were much purer than under the Kings.²⁴ To prove the point that republicanism is *the inevitable future of nations* Lang drew on the French authors Victor Hugo and Alphonse de Lamartine, but he dismissed any relevance of the two-time failure of the republican order in France to the Australian case.²⁵

In opposition to the then dominant political view, Lang claimed there was no other form of government possible in independent Australia than a republic. *We have neither the requisite material nor the requisite tradition for any other*.²⁶ He insisted in 1870 that the choice of a republican system for Australia was a *settled point*, based not on reasoning from abstract principles but *from the necessity of the case*.²⁷ Since the British

²¹ Idem, *Religion and Education in America*, London, 1840, p. 419.

²² Idem, *Queensland, Australia: A Highly Eligible Field for Emigration, and the Future Cotton-field of Great Britain: with a Disquisition on the Origin, Manners, and Customs of the Aborigines*, London, 1861, pp. vii, 223.

²³ Idem, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom and Independence for the Seven United Provinces of Australia*, London 1870, pp. iv-vi.

²⁴ Idem, *Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia. The Right of The Colonies and The Interest of Britain and The World*, London 1852, reprint Forgotten Books 2012, pp. 61-77.

²⁵ Idem, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom...*, pp. 20-22, 26-27.

²⁶ Idem, *The Coming Event; or the United...*, p. 26.

²⁷ Idem, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom...*, p. 320.

government is rightly characterized as a *disguised Republic* and constitutional reforms have dispensed of some of this disguise, *why then should Englishmen object to a Republic without disguise for their emancipated colonies?* – Lang asked.²⁸ He also argued that attached to their monarchy as the Britons rightly were, they still accepted that in other circumstances other people might live under a different constitutional order. Even such an ardent admirer of constitutional monarchy as Edmund Burke admitted that in some situations a republican system might be necessary or even desirable. In the case of a free and independent Australia – Lang repeated – the only form of government practicable at all was a democratic republic.²⁹

For a republican model, a federal system appealed most of all to Lang, as it *ensured good government at a very moderate expense, and especially the administration of equal justice to all.*³⁰ Although he admired America and was convinced that numerous British policies and institutions compared unfavourably with their American counterparts, he had no doubts that the establishment of an Australian National Government and the inclusion of more colonies into a joint federal body would proceed as rapidly as in the U.S. and *in a far less exceptionable way.* This was to result in a petition by New Zealand to join the great Australian Union.³¹ However, despite his criticism of British policies regarding the Antipodes, in 1870 Lang still saw a role for Great Britain in the creation of a new federation. Taking into consideration negotiations among Australian colonies on tariffs and proposals of a future federal state, he called for London not to grant independence to separate colonies but only to one federal state. *As separate and independent communities, the present Australian colonies would be comparatively insignificant, and would have no weight or influence in the family of nations; but seven such provinces combined, with the whole Eastern coastline towards the Pacific as the measure of their empire, would at once form the first power in the Southern Hemisphere and prove a formidable rival [...] even to the United States.*³²

Notwithstanding Lang's opposition to British imperialism, he gradually developed his own vision of an Australian empire in the Pacific region. For obvious reasons it was too early for this issue to be addressed in the first edition of his most popular monograph *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales. Both as a Penal Settlement and as a British Colony*, published in 1834.³³ In *Freedom and Independence for The Golden Lands of Australia* a few tentative remarks came up, including suggestions of the occupation and settlement of New Guinea as a ninth province of the Australian Union. *It would prove* – Lang envisaged – *like the East and West Indies to the adventurous youth of the Union, who would there grow tropical productions by means of Aboriginal,*

²⁸ Idem, *Freedom...*, p. 64.

²⁹ Idem, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom...*, p. 22-23.

³⁰ J.D. Lang, D.W.A. Baker, *Reminiscences of My Life and Times Both in Church and State in Australia for Upwards of Fifty Years*, Melbourne, 1972, p. 187.

³¹ J.D. Lang, *Freedom...*, p. 289.

³² Idem, *The Coming event! Or Freedom...*, p. 315.

³³ Idem, *An Historical and Statistical Account...*, London 1834.

Malayan, or Chinese labour.³⁴ He also expected two more provinces to be formed from the islands of the western Pacific, with New Caledonia as the centre of one of them. In the second edition, which appeared in 1857, he elaborated on these points in more detail. For example, now he was convinced that New Zealand would apply to join the Australian Union within three years of its formation.³⁵ However, his last major publications, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom and Independence* (1870) and the expanded fourth edition of *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales*, now with subtitle *From The Founding of The Colony in 1788 to The Present Day*, (1875) offered a comprehensive account of future Australian expansion in the Western Pacific Ocean and adjacent lands. Given the growing penetration of the area by adventurers from Europe and the US, and the possibility of American, French and German control or even annexation of particular islands, most notably Fiji, New Caledonia and the New Hebrides, Lang urged that independent Australia should, as soon as possible, extend moral support and material protection as well as stable government there. His vision of Australia's role in the region was definitely not one of anybody's deputy-sheriff. When recognized as an independent state, the Seven United Provinces of Australia *should immediately take possession of the Fiji Islands, of the New Hebrides group of Islands, and of the Solomon Islands ... not, however, with a view to the permanent annexation of these three groups of islands, as part and parcel of the Australian Empire; but simply with a view to the setting up of regular government in the respective groups, through the formation of a series of Australian Protectorates, for the civilization of the Aborigines on the one hand, and the creation of a vast Emigration Field, for the progressive settlement of perhaps half a million of the redundant population of the United Kingdom on the other*.³⁶

From Lang's perspective, independence would not be just an offshoot of historical evolution. It constituted a necessary precondition for Australia's development and future greatness. Without independence Australia would not realize its immense potential. Invoking his long experience in Australian colonies, he did not hesitate to declare that the very worst possible government elected by popular vote when these colonies were independent *would be incomparably better than the very best we are ever likely to have under their connection with Great Britain*.³⁷ To Lang's mind, their wretched government and backward conditions *in comparison with what they might be if they were only allowed to govern themselves, were a positive disgrace to the British name and a calamity to the civilized world*.³⁸

Lang also rejected the notion of Australia's security being guaranteed by participation in the British Empire. On the contrary, in his opinion it was simply impossible for Great Britain to protect her colonies scattered all over the world, and any conflict involving the Mother Country would inevitably threaten Australian lands. For instance,

³⁴ Idem, *Freedom...*, p. 290.

³⁵ D.W.A. Baker, *Days...*, p. 490.

³⁶ J.D. Lang, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom...*, pp. 382, 339-343.

³⁷ Idem, *Freedom...*, p. 61.

³⁸ Idem, *The Coming Event or the United...*, p. 19.

in the event of war between the UK and France they would be a target for attack, while the Pacific Ocean would become a battlefield for European navies. Australians had no military forces and it would be both useless and too expensive to build them from scratch. In addition, it would have a demoralizing effect on the community.³⁹ Only an independent, neutral and peaceful, if not pacifist, Australia could safeguard its own security. In Lang's plans a sovereign Australian state would retain British habits, associations and fraternal affection, at the same time *living in peace and harmony with all mankind ... holding out ... the right hand of friendship and fellowship to Frenchmen, American and Russ alike, whatever wars might rage in Europe*.⁴⁰ Neither the Aboriginal population nor the *inoffensive and unwarlike people* of the Malays, China or Japan, nor anybody else within the semicircle extending to the Equator, the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Horn, could – in Lang's view – pose a threat to an independent Australia. The only maritime powers capable of reaching Australia were France, Russia and America, but they were extremely unlikely to attack, unless provoked by the United Kingdom. Consequently, Lang argued that the danger of colonial societies in Australia being drawn into war resulted from their connection to and dependence on Great Britain. As he added sardonically, *considering the warlike propensities of our worthy mother, and the character she has so long sustained of being the prize-fighter and pay-mistress of the world, our chance of peace under her wing is at best but very precarious*.⁴¹

An independent Australian polity, Lang asserted, would create conditions for the vigorous growth of education, moral improvement and the spread of Christianity. It *would give a wonderful impulse to the cause of popular education*, as republican institutions could not function without a well-educated citizenry. Lang believed that *liberal appropriations would most willingly be made by any popular government in Australia for education of all kinds* from the primary to the university level. He also predicted that *the morals of the people would be promoted to a wonderful degree by the achievement of their national freedom*. That would be brought about by the abolition of the office of the immoral governor – he meant Charles FitzRoy – who lowered the moral temperature in New South Wales *like an iceberg in the great Southern Ocean*. Besides, the population of Australian colonies, even the respectable classes, had been until then deprived of political rights and influence, which made them, Lang maintained, indifferent to participation in public life and diverted their ambitions towards the pursuit of wealth. *It is indispensably necessary for the moral welfare and advancement of society that men should both know and feel that they have a country*. Furthermore, Lang was confident that Christianity, in its purest forms, by which he meant Protestantism, would triumph *rapidly under the flag of entire freedom and national independence*. With state subsidies abolished, no religious denomination could be favoured. The truth would ultimately

³⁹ Idem, *How to Defend the Colony: Being the Substance of a Speech Delivered in the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales*, Sydney 1860, pp. 8-22.

⁴⁰ Idem, *The Prospect for Australia in the Event of a War with France: Being a Lecture Delivered in Sydney in the Evening of Monday, August 23rd, 1858*, Sydney 1858, p. 13.

⁴¹ Idem, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom!...*, pp. 146-153.

prevail and Christianity would spread in Australia and in adjacent lands. Lang found it *one of the profoundest mysteries in the history of man* that the landing of criminals on Australian shores was the first in the series of events destined to spread *the civilization and Christianization of a large portion of the southern hemisphere*.⁴²

Was it possible that all these desirable goals – material, educational, moral and religious advancement, security and a proper standing in the world – would be unattainable for generations to come because of setbacks or a total blockade on the road to independence? Lang ruled out such a scenario. To him national independence would by no means be the result of lucky chance, a fluke of history. To the contrary, given the historical conditions Australia's political sovereignty, freedom and democratic order *had* to come into existence because social reality was governed by general rules concerning the state and the evolution of modern civilized societies.

Among the significant 19th-century ideas which constituted a prominent aspect of Lang's worldview and convinced him to espouse the cause of the *freedom and independence of the Golden Lands of Australia* was the concept of progress. He was a great enthusiast of modern technology, a believer in the development of commerce, industrialisation and free trade. Also, the discovery of gold – in Lang's eyes – was of great significance, not so much because of profits from mining, but because of its impact on the rapid growth of population. Consequently, in 1852 he anticipated that great economic and social progress would inevitably lead to independence. London would not be in a position to stop this process. As Lang cited approvingly from the London Times, *a country which is being peopled at the rate of five thousand a week by men nursed in freedom will soon be able to demand as a right that which she now entreats as a favour*.⁴³ In 1870, he concluded that the unexpected discovery of gold transmuted the prospect of independence from a remote contingency into an impending reality.⁴⁴

In his utopian vision of Australia in 1871, Lang, an avid traveller, was not intimidated by the 'tyranny of distance'. He even disputed the opinion that the distance between Australia and the European market was *an insurmountable obstacle to our success in competing with Americans*.⁴⁵ It was his staunch belief that in comparison with the entire colonial period in American history, now *the great clock of the world is going at a prodigiously accelerated ratio. [...] Then they travelled by bullock-drays and canal boats at the ratio of two or three knots an hour; now we have got steamboats, railroads, and electric telegraph*.⁴⁶ Modernization and technical progress impacted on social progress and precipitated the rise of new nations. Since the American and French revolutions *society had been re-published in a new and improved edition, and it springs forth to life at once, of full growth and armed to the teeth, with all the approved appliances of modern civilisation, like the goddess*

⁴² Idem, *Freedom...*, pp. 292-296.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 198.

⁴⁴ J.D. Lang, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom...*, p. 305-306.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Freedom...*, p. 288.

⁴⁶ Idem, "Dr. Lang and Independence. To the Editor of The Empire", *Empire*, Supplement to *The Empire*, 20 December 1853, p. 1, at <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/page/5969211>>, 22 February 2018.

*Minerva from the head of Jupiter. ... It is sheer trifling, therefore, to tell us, as certain colonial wiseacres have done, that we must wait here for the slow and gradual development of the great idea of independence, as long as they had to wait in the old American colonies. Why, in our present rate of progress in Australia, we are moving onward in the highroad towards nationality and independence as much in five years as the American colonies did in a century.*⁴⁷

This brings us to another influential nineteenth century idea – that of modern nationalism. Lang understood contemporary nations as both the outcome of the transformation of modern civilization and the expression of natural law based on divine design. He claimed that the desire for independence was natural to colonists. If it is the necessary result of the circumstances in which they were placed, as much as *a nation was formed with them*, it is implemented by the creator, so it is the gift of God to mankind. In his view nationality was *absolutely necessary for social welfare and political advancement of the Australian colonies. Give us this, and you give us everything to enable us to become a great and glorious people. Withhold this, and you give us nothing.*⁴⁸ In contrast, the British colonial system had developed by accident, was unjust, disastrous for both the United Kingdom and colonies, and unwarranted by the law of nature and nations.

The final question here is: when did Lang expect Australian national independence to materialize? His predictions varied depending on when and to whom he addressed his analyses and appeals, but on the whole the evolution of his views on the topic is quite apparent, from what he described in 1840 as *a far distant day*, with the proviso that he spoke as a loyal British subject and independence was all the same *most assuredly in reserve*,⁴⁹ to the already cited *impending reality* in 1870. In the meantime, he argued and pleaded for the independence of Australia and even threatened the prospect of popular revolt. This was all in vain. He grew impatient with the attitude of the British government, who in theory accepted that one day in the future colonies should become sovereign and independent, but not just yet. From the London perspective the proper time had not come. Lang remarked scathingly that judging from the opinions and policies of *Mr. Mother-Country and his friends i.e. the Government and their hangers-on at home, this time will never be allowed to have come, until the colonies shall in all probability be compelled in self-defence to wrest their freedom and independence.*⁵⁰ His growing exasperation with fellow Australians was also visible. In 1870, he inscribed *The Coming Event! Or Freedom and Independence* to the electors of the City of Sydney in the hope that they would take the initiative *when the proper time comes* for the establishment of an independent state.⁵¹ Obviously, they were not ready to take such steps. The overwhelming majority of his countrymen opposed separation and abhorred republicanism. In vain he exhorted his fellow Australians in an editorial in the same issue of *The Press*, which included the above-cited vision of a future Australia: *And what a splendid*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Idem, *Freedom...*, p. 41-42.

⁴⁹ Idem, *The Moral...*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Idem, *The Coming Event; or the United...*, p. 18.

⁵¹ Idem, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom...*, p. iv.

Empire will 'The Seven United Provinces of Australia' become, in the estimation of the whole civilized world, even before the present generation shall have passed away from the face of the earth. [...] We will yield to none in our enthusiastic love for our fatherland, and for all that is really great and good in her institutions! Still, however, it is the earnest desire of our hearts that Australia, the land of our adoption, may speedily be –

Glorious, independent, and free,

*First flower of the earth, and first gem of the sea.*⁵²

Facing a choice between a struggle for fully-fledged independence, most likely based on the American model, and a continuation of the imperial connection, with responsible government in autonomous colonies and British liberties as a source of the political and legal order, settlers and their descendants overwhelmingly opted for the latter. This choice was well encapsulated by Henry Parkes, during his close cooperation with Lang in the anti-transportation campaign and the disputes over the Constitution Bill for New South Wales. At a huge public meeting in 1853, Parkes argued that it would be a fatal mistake to imitate the American form of government. He did not want a *Yankee Constitution* and was confident that *Australia was destined to show the spectacle of a great and free nation, but closely allied and affiliated to England (cheers)*.⁵³ Historian Mark McKenna compared these two perspectives on Australia's future: *Lang's vision was optimistic, romantic, independent and nationalist, while Parkes' was cautious, pragmatic and dependent*.⁵⁴

Consequently, it is argued, as long as Parkes' tradition of maintaining the British connection retained its grip and Australia continued to play a *derivative and only quasi-independent role*, especially in foreign and defence policy, Lang's radical republicanism, explicit nationalism and focus on Australia and its geographical region led to his marginalization in historical memory. However, with the republican debate raging at the end of the 20th century, Angus Edmonds called for *retrieving John Dunmore Lang from the footnotes of Australian history* and held him up as a source of inspiration for twenty-first century Australia.⁵⁵ He was described as a *Presbyterian fantasist*,⁵⁶ a self-proclaimed prophet, who heralded *the Divinely ordained nation-state of the South*, and as a visionary little concerned with reality,⁵⁷ a planner, not a practical politician, whose concrete political achievements were few.⁵⁸

⁵² "Colonial Politics. The Australian Future", *The Press*, no. 26, 25 June 1851, p. 295.

⁵³ "Public Meeting on the Constitution Bill", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 September 1853, p. 4, at <<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/page/1505962?zoomLevel=1a>>, 22 February 2018; also H. Parkes, *Fifty Years in The Making of Australian History*, London 1892, p. 47.

⁵⁴ M. McKenna, *The Captive Republic. A History of Republicanism in Australia 1788-1996*, Cambridge 1996, p. 63.

⁵⁵ A. Edmonds, "Auld Lang Syne: Retrieving John Dunmore Lang from the Footnote of Australian History", *Royal Historical Society of Queensland Journal*, no. 1, August 2001, pp. 443-447.

⁵⁶ N. McLachlan, *Waiting for the Revolution. A History of Australian Nationalism*, Ringwood, Vic 1989, p. 76.

⁵⁷ K. Elford, "A Prophet without Honour. The Political Ideals of John Dunmore Lang", *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 54, pt. 2, June 1968, pp. 161, 172.

⁵⁸ D. Macmillan, *Great Australians. John Dunmore Lang*, Melbourne 1962, p. 29.

However, contrary to what Parkes suggested, Lang did not waste his time chasing phantoms in pursuit of his long-term goals.⁵⁹ Not all of his prognoses materialized, nor was every scheme or suggestion accepted and carried out; yet many of them were, albeit in different times and with varying degrees of success. Although Lang did not hold high office, with his legislative legacy scarce and real impact on day-to-day colonial politics small, he still contributed greatly to political and social changes in the Australian colonies, including the end of convict transportations, educational and land reforms, the establishment of new colonies, and the introduction of responsible and democratic colonial government. In the long run, owing to his attempts at the popularization of the federal idea and the influence he had on his contemporaries, including Parkes, Lang advanced the cause of an Australian federation, which came into existence 22 years after his death. Even his struggle for a republic, which proved to be a lost battle, was not entirely in vain, as he laid the foundations for modern Australian nationalism. In McKenna's opinion, the republicanism of the last two decades of the twentieth century in Australia seems shallow compared to Lang's earlier contributions. His *vision has not yet been matched*. In *Freedom and Independence* he gave a detailed blueprint for a republican government.⁶⁰

The grand picture of Australia-to-be was a tool in Lang's attempts to achieve his political goals. It served his efforts to stimulate Australian national sentiment and to urge his fellow-citizens – as he put it in 1870 – *to assume the noble position of a Sovereign and Independent State on the Pacific Ocean* and to recognise their *duty in this matter – to themselves, to Great Britain and to the world*.⁶¹ What would follow was an independent and just nation, morally sound and materially successful; the nation which would control the South Pacific and sooner or later would equal, if not surpass, the United States on the global stage. Such a vision overrode petty colonial squabbling and the supposed advantages of being part of the British Empire. Consequently, it warranted taking steps towards a friendly separation from the mother country that Lang considered beneficial and necessary for both Australia and Britain. Whatever rhetorical and persuasive functions Lang's proposals, predictions and prophecies could have had, in his time they constituted an immense and challenging vision for an independent Australia. That vision was conceived out of his passionately held convictions and reached far beyond the historical horizon of his contemporaries.

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⁵⁹ "Freedom and Independence", *Empire*, 1 February 1854, p. 2, at <<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60148820?browse=ndp%3Abrowse%2Ftitle%2FE%2Ftitle%2F67%2F1854%2F02%2F01%2Fpage%2F5969439%2Farticle%2F60148820>>, 22 February 2018.

⁶⁰ M. McKenna, *The Captive...*, p. 80.

⁶¹ J.D. Lang, *The Coming Event! Or Freedom...*, pp. 324-325.

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