

## Andrew Inglis Clark: From Colonial Patriot to Radical Nationalist

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Andrew Inglis Clark was a nationalist and a republican. He wished to cut the ties linking the Australian colonies with imperial Britain. The English author and politician Charles Dilke observed in 1890 that Clark was ‘a great admirer of American institutions and literature, and an anti-imperialist in his opinions upon the future relations between the component portions of the Empire’.<sup>1</sup> These ideas meant that Clark stood out among his contemporaries—those men who dominated the colonial parliaments during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and who both led the federal movement and crafted the Australian Constitution. This was true even when the comparison is made with the native-born leaders of his generation, men like Barton, Deakin, Kingston and Forrest. In his book *The Sentimental Nation*, John Hirst observed that among the members of the National Australasian Convention in 1891, ‘the inner group of founding fathers’, Clark was the only republican.<sup>2</sup>

This suggests that two questions must be addressed. Why was Clark a republican? And perhaps even more pertinently why was he the only one? The first question relates to the man; the second to the nature of Australian society on the eve of federation.

Clark’s republican nationalism has typically been seen as an exotic growth, even an un-Australian one. Although he grew up in a small, isolated colony Clark was a cosmopolitan intellectual. He was, as Dilke noted, an avid student of American history, literature and jurisprudence. His spiritual home was Boston rather than London. But he had also been inspired by the Italian Risorgimento. He was deeply influenced by the great prophet of the nation state, Giuseppe Mazzini. Clark had a portrait of the Italian in his study and on his first visit to Europe went on a pilgrimage to his tomb. The experience inspired a hagiographical poem.

With these well-known influences it has been easy to assume that Clark’s distinctive republicanism was brought into the Australian colonies from outside. That being so they may be interesting but peripheral to the mainstream history of Australian nationalism. Standard accounts of nationalist evolution often ignore Clark altogether.<sup>3</sup> This paper will seek to establish the case that running parallel with Clark’s intellectual interests was the strength of a precocious and distinctive Tasmanian patriotism which had already taken deep root in the colony by the time that Clark was born in 1848. His nationalism absorbed ideas from outside but it was essentially endogenous and more interesting for that reason.

We need then to focus on the ideas of the native-born Tasmanians as they developed in the first half of the nineteenth century. It will be necessary initially to consider the distinctive features of Island development. In his recent book *Van Diemen’s Land*, James Boyce emphasises the differences between the experience of early settlers in Tasmania and those in New South Wales.<sup>4</sup> The Island was a much more benign environment with a mild climate, abundant water, open grasslands and plentiful game. Convict and free settler alike quickly developed attachment to the soil. The landscape was admired from the very first days of settlement. Island patriotism emerged within a generation. The imperial official G.T. Boyes set out to describe the attitudes he observed among the first generation of native-born youth in a letter home to Britain in 1831, writing:

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1 C. Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, MacMillan, London, 1892, p. 225.

2 J. Hirst, *Sentimental Nation*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000, p. 11.

3 See for instance S. Alomes and C. Jones, *Australian History: A Documentary History*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1991.

4 J. Boyce, *Van Diemen’s Land*, Black Inc Books, Melbourne, 2008.

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They are such beauties, you cannot imagine such a beautiful race as the rising generation in this Colony. As they grow up they think nothing of England and can't bear the idea of going there. It is extraordinary the passionate love they have for the country of their birth ...<sup>5</sup>

Twenty years later the native-born became involved in the intense political struggle to force the imperial government to bring an end to convict transportation. In October 1851 an estimated crowd of 300 young men and women held a meeting to add their voice to the campaign. They clearly had a strong sense of being a distinctive group with a powerful identification with the Island. 'It is a duty we owe to that country in which we hope to live and die', one of the evening's speakers observed 'for Tasmanians the love of country is a sacred and soul-ennobling feeling'. Other young orators linked their patriotism to land and landscape, declaring:

Who can ascend our noble and romantic hills without being imbued with a spirit of freedom? What reflecting mind can breathe the pure air of our mountain tops without feeling a desire to accomplish the freedom of his native land?<sup>6</sup>

Similar sentiments were voiced and were met with exuberant, approving applause. The response was so emphatic that we can assume that the young Clark grew up among a generation of native-born men and women who held and openly expressed strong feelings of patriotism and who had taken part in a campaign that was directly opposed to the policies of the British Government.

This helps us understand why, as a bookish adult, Clark found in Mazzini endorsement for ideas he had already absorbed from his environment. Mazzini provided inspiration for anyone seeking to nurture the emergence of a new, or the liberation of a captive, nation. In a much admired passage he declared:

Nationhood is sacred. The pact of humanity cannot be signed by individuals, but by free and equal peoples with a name, a flag and a consciousness of their own life ... God has prescribed the affirmation of its nationhood to every people as the part it must play in the work of humanity: this is the mission, the task that each people must perform upon earth ...<sup>7</sup>

Diverse geography both underpinned the nation and undermined empire. Every part of the world would eventually give expression to distinctive national life. Human beings were bound to their individual homelands. Love of country was 'innate in all men'. Nationality emerged from place, Mazzini declaring: 'The life inherent in each locality is sacred'.<sup>8</sup>

Clark's speeches and essays on nationalism indicate the power of the Mazzini message. During the Federation Conference of 1890 he discussed the requirements for a nation. It needed a sufficient population, he observed:

But that population to be a nation must be localized ... within certain physical limits, and must be responsive to the influences of its physical environment. I believe that it is to such conditions we owe all the nationalities existing in the world. [When people] are brought in contact with each other within a given physical environment, there will be produced a distinct type of life, and, in the case of nations, a distinct type of national life.<sup>9</sup>

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5 P. Chapman (ed.), *The Diaries and Letters of G.T.W.B. Boyes, 1820–1832*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 496.

6 *Launceston Examiner*, 25 October 1851, p. 5.

7 G. Salvemini, *Mazzini*, Cape, London, 1956, p. 56.

8 N. Gangulie (ed.), *Giuseppe Mazzini's Selected Writings*, L. D. Limited, London, no date, pp. 130, 132.

9 *Official Record of the Proceedings and Debates of the Australasian Federation Conference*, Melbourne, 12 February 1890, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1890, p. 36.

The task for Clark and his contemporaries was to use all their endeavours to bring Australia's latent nationality to triumphant fruition. In 1898 he wrote:

Every one of us who was born on Australasian soil may well be proud of our British origins and traditions; but Australasia is emphatically and peculiarly our country and our home, and our highest duty to our children and to humanity is to do all that is within our power to ensure the development and maturity which Providence has appointed us to create.<sup>10</sup>

Both Britain and the United States had parts to play in this crusade. The Americans provided the example of the British colonies which had achieved their independence and created a distinctive way of life with their own institutions, jurisprudence, customs and culture. As he explained to his colleagues at the Federation Conference in 1890: 'a different type of manhood has already developed itself in the United States of America, and the same process is going on in regard to the countries of South America'.<sup>11</sup> While Australians had reason to be proud of their British heritage it was only by achieving independence that the national destiny could be consummated. In an essay entitled 'The Future of the Australian Commonwealth: A Province or a Nation', he warned that:

if the Commonwealth of Australia remains forever an appendage of the British Empire, a distinctively Australian nation will never contribute its distinctively national ideals and achievements to the history of the world ...<sup>12</sup>

Australians had a task of global importance. Occupying a large and distinctive part of the world, their true destiny was to create institutions and customs which reflected their geographical location. History indicated that,

the distinctive characteristics exhibited by many of the nations of the world have been largely created by the influences of geographical location and general physical environment upon numerous generations of progenitors.<sup>13</sup>

It was the overshadowing Empire which stood in the way as he explained in his speech to the 1890 Federation Conference. The 'distinct type of national life ... will never come to perfect fruition, will never produce the best results without political autonomy'.<sup>14</sup>

This paper began by considering two problems: (1) Why was Andrew Inglis Clark a republican and a nationalist? (2) Why was he the only one among his cohort of colonial politicians? In attempting to answer the first question we begin to approach the second. What then was distinctive about Clark's intellectual heritage? His Tasmanian upbringing was clearly important. During his childhood the colony was absorbed in a long and intense campaign to prevent the British Government from transporting any more convicts to the Island. His parents were involved in the campaign. It was at times explicitly anti-British with attendant hostility directed to both the Colonial Office and the local governor Sir William Denison. By the middle of the nineteenth century a strong sense of local patriotism had developed which was intimately linked with the ubiquitous appreciation of the Island landscape. The native-born

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10 Cited in W. Jethro Brown, *Why Federate?*, Angus and Robinson, Sydney, 1898, p. 37.

11 *Official Record of the Proceedings and Debates of the Australasian Federation Conference*, 1890, op. cit., p. 36.

12 Richard Ely (ed.), *A Living Force: Andrew Inglis Clark and the Ideal Commonwealth*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, 2001, p. 244.

13 *ibid.*, p. 242.

14 *Official Record of the Proceedings and Debates of the Australasian Federation Conference*, 1890, op. cit., p. 36.

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youth expressed their love of their homeland publicly and without embarrassment or restraint. Clark was clearly influenced by the public mood which was pro-Tasmanian and anti-English. When he began his exploration of intellectual currents of his time he found in Mazzini a prophet who placed the pursuit of nationhood among the most noble of contemporary causes. But the idea that human beings were by nature attached to the land of their birth would hardly have been new to him nor the belief that a distinctive physical environment would bring forth unique cultural forms. They in turn would provide the bedrock for an independent nation state. On almost all of these points the United States provided Clark with confirmation of both his nationalism and his republicanism. Here was the proving ground for his belief in the power of the new world to produce distinctive institutions and customs. The Americas as a whole were seeing the emergence of different types of manhood. Australia, he assumed, would necessarily follow in their wake.

It was this particular heritage which provided Clark with immunity to the resurgence of imperial loyalty in the final years of the nineteenth century. Unlike his contemporaries he was not swayed by loyalty to the Crown which became such a powerful force in the final years of Victoria's reign accompanied by those spectacular festivals of royalty, the golden jubilee in 1887 and the diamond jubilee ten years later. He was able to draw on American precedents in law and government to temper the devotion which many of his contemporaries directed to Westminster and the common law. He was also resistant to the growing coeval emphasis on race with the necessary implication that Australia and Britain were bound together by blood. For him his nationalism was grounded in and bounded by place. Race was, among many things, an imperial ideology which tied Australia to Britain in defiance of the dictates of locality and distance.

The South Australian and later federal politician Patrick McMahon Glynn met Clark for the first time in Sydney in January 1901 at the celebrations for the founding of the Commonwealth. He noted in his diary that the Tasmanian was 'a radical with an inspiring faith in the national spirit of the people and not subdued by Imperial temper'.<sup>15</sup> It was a perceptive assessment and helps explain Clark's distinctive sense of national destiny.



**QUESTION** — I would like to ask Dr Bannon a question. What was it about Charles Kingston's life that made his wife so frightened that she burned all his papers?

**Dr BANNON** — We are talking today, I thought, in these hallowed halls, about honoured statesmen and makers of constitutions and nations. But, yes, there is a seamy side to many people. Some people say Kingston was a roistering sort of fellow—he drank and smoked and so on. He didn't at all. He did not drink. He did not smoke. He was quite rigorous in his health and fitness and so on, although he suffered very bad health in later years. He was extraordinarily disciplined in his work. His knowledge of parliamentary procedure and so on arose from the fact that he was rarely absent from the House when it was sitting, even as a minister. I have had the experience myself—the House is droning on in the background and you have got important things to do; you do not want to waste your time in there. Kingston would be in there. He is interjecting in debates; he is following things; he is intervening. So he was absolutely assiduous in his public duties. He had a fatal flaw: he was a lecher of the highest order, and he was a bit of a manic depressive, so he would be in high moods and low moods.

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15 Patrick McMahon Glynn, Diary, 4 January 1901, National Library of Australia, MS 4653, series 3, box 1, p. 101.

His marriage began with his application as a young man to be admitted to the Bar, which was formally objected to by the brother of a woman he was actually living with at the time, who said that he was not a fit and proper person to be admitted because of his gross immorality. The application was dismissed, and it is alleged that Kingston left the court and pursued the accuser and they had a fisticuff fight in which Kingston came out on top. He married the woman, as it happened, and they were married for the rest of their life, but they had no children—which is not to say Kingston did not have children, because indeed he did. They adopted, in fact, a son, Kevin Kingston, who was the product of a liaison that nearly destroyed his whole political career.

He had an affair with a society lady in the early stages of his career. He was Attorney-General at the time. He was named as a co-respondent in the divorce proceedings—absolutely scandalous and shocking in Victorian South Australia. He went to the electorate. At a famous meeting he pleaded for their forgiveness. He said how appallingly sorry he was and could a man be responsible for his sins for the rest of his life et cetera and he scraped home in the ballot. I think he resolved after that never to get involved in a high-profile, scandalous liaison again. But he had a lot of very different liaisons. Indeed, some forensic work we have done, which may be published at some stage, indicates there are three or four progeny of Charles Cameron Kingston around Adelaide.

There is the scandalous aspect of his life. It was spontaneous. It was exploitative. It was out of character with many other things he did. But it meant that he was excluded from Adelaide society. There were people who would not dine with him or be seen in his company. Mrs Kingston herself acutely felt it.

When Kingston was offered a knighthood in 1897 he refused it. Tom Playford, who was over in London at the time said, ‘Well, Charlie’s knocked back this knighthood. Mrs Kingston is giving him an absolutely terrible time; I don’t know how he can put up with it!’ That is because for Mrs Kingston this just would have been one way of getting back into a society from which she had been excluded. So he paid a heavy penalty socially, but it did not seem to affect his public work.

**QUESTION** — I refer to Rosemary’s paper. She mentioned that Clark was very opposed to the adversarialism of the parliamentary system. I think you imply that perhaps his liking of the US Constitution combined with the parliamentary system—the Westminster system—was a problem. Clark, of course, later on was the one who introduced proportional representation in Tasmania and also advocated this generally. It was not taken up, but he did advocate it. Could you perhaps explain a little bit more about his preference for proportional representation. That was, of course, the Hare–Clark system later on.

**Dr LAING** — I am not sure if I am qualified to do that. But Henry will offer a comment. I think that it was really his dislike of responsible government, because he saw it was such a personality thing, that flavoured his early views. But I am not an expert on his electoral work, so I will ask Henry to respond to that.

**Prof. REYNOLDS** — Yes it is very interesting, because it was very innovative for a small colony. There were various reasons that came together. One was that if you had multiple electorates in Hobart then landlords could have many votes, because they would have a vote in each electorate. There was still a property qualification.

Secondly, I think he had been profoundly influenced by the whole convict and post-convict experience. It was in many ways a caste society: those who had been convicts—even the children of convicts—were

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marked for life. It was a small place and everyone knew who was and who wasn't. Therefore, I think it was important to him to have an electoral system which gave an exact reflection of the vote, and that everyone's vote would be equal.

Beyond that was his intellectual background. He was a mid-Victorian liberal—John Stuart Mill was one of his great influences, and Thomas Hare, who had first proposed this. John Stuart Mill regarded this as one of the great liberal advances, this idea of proportional representation.

So it was introduced and very few of the rest of the parliament understood the detail, but it was accepted in 1896 for the elections in Hobart and then eventually in 1909, just after Clark's death, it was adopted for the whole state and has been there ever since. So, yes, of his state and of his colonial political reforms it was probably the most important and the one most enduring.

**Dr BANNON** — Just a quick footnote, if I may, in relation to this: one of Clark's great disciples and followers in this respect was Catherine Helen Spence in South Australia, who actually stood—she was the only woman—to be a delegate to the Federal Convention in 1897. She did not get elected. She did not do too badly, but her whole platform was based not around the rights of women to be represented or anything like that, it was about the promotion of the Hare–Clark system and proportional representation and the way in which representation could be gathered.

Such were her principles that she was actually offered a place on one of the tickets which may well have secured her election, interestingly, but she refused because she said, 'No, that is inappropriate. I am campaigning for a broad, non-party approach to selecting political candidates'. I am going to blame Inglis Clark for denying us the only woman delegate to the making of the Constitution.

**QUESTION** — You basically talked about the contribution of these people to how we run our country. I am also interested in some of the ways that we do not run our country: some of the things that made it into the Constitution and then got strangled at birth—things like the Inter-State Commission; or you read the Constitution and it will tell you that ministers get appointed for a year, I think, and they do not have to be MPs. There are all sorts of things that have nothing to do with how we run the country. How much of that was influenced by these early draftings by Clark and so forth? And how much of it happened later?

**Dr LAING** — This is not an actual response. I think that is a fantastic question and I think it is probably a question for our last session, because I think that throughout the day we will get some insight into some of those very important matters that you have raised.

**Dr BANNON** — The Inter-State Commission is a very good point. I think it is one of the great lost opportunities of the federation—it has been attempted to revive it from time to time—struck down over jurisdiction issues. It was going to handle things like rivers and railways and various national issues that the Constitution or the powers of the federal government have not clarified in a particular way. It was visionary, but it was strangled at birth, unfortunately.

**QUESTION** — Do you think that Clark, by making the Supreme Courts or the High Court strong, helped kill it?

**Dr BANNON** —No, I don't think so. I think it was important for that independent High Court

with its interpretive powers, but you could argue, of course, that from time to time the attitude of the courts, their strict interpretations and so on, have undermined what is clearly parliament's will, or even popular will. But sometimes it works the opposite way as well—sometimes they are a bulwark to our liberties, as some people describe. You have got to look at each case on its merits, but I think in that one they were clearly wrong.

**QUESTION** — My question was predominantly for Professor Reynolds. You mentioned locality as a significant aspect in this notion that Australia and Australia's native people had something of their own to contribute in a global sense, particularly intellectually. I think that notion runs rather contrary to other ideas in our history like, for instance, 'the same minds under different stars', popularly propagated by institutions like Sydney University in that case. I was wondering if you might be able to speak a little more concretely on what particularly about Australia's geography, isolation and so forth could actually have shaped specific ideas that Australia might have turned up as opposed to other nations in other parts of the world with a similar degree of talent perhaps.

**Prof. REYNOLDS** — Firstly, the big distinction between Clark, who says the nation has to be 'bounded'—'That is the nation'—to many of his contemporaries who said, 'No, we're part of the British nation'. I mean, Sir John Forrest, exact contemporary, native-born, said, 'We are not a nation, we are merely part of a nation'. If you looked at race and culture then there were no boundaries, so your patriotism became British. And that is the difference between particularly race and place, and on those foundations two quite different sets of ideas are developed.

If you said to Clark: 'Well, come on, the Italians, after all, they are bounded by the sea and the alps, it is a very distinctive area, they have got a long tradition' and all the rest of it. What did he think Australia had? Well, he looked to America and said, 'Look what the Americans have done with independence: they have created totally distinctive institutions and ways of life and literature', of which he was very familiar. And quite apart from, as he would say, climate and soil and physical environment, he also included the institutions that were developing.

In one of the famous exchanges in the 1890 meeting, when I think one of the South Australians said, 'We live under the Westminster system', he said: 'No, we don't. We don't live under the Westminster system; each colony in effect has developed their own institutions and in no way are we any longer under the Westminster system'. So he saw the development of ideas and institutions through parliament as one of the distinctive features, and this in a way was dependent on the development of local traditions as well as physical locality. So he is the one who is outraged, among many, when the appeal to the Privy Council remains in the Constitution and, despite being a Supreme Court judge, writes a long, angry letter, furious letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald* saying how dreadful this was. So, yes, it was a combination of: you've got a distinct environment, you've got distinct traditions and we are developing our own institutions, and, as for many people up to about 1870 and 1880, why wouldn't we become like America or like the republics in South America? That seemed to be the natural destiny that Australia would follow.