

## MAURICE O'REILLY CM: A REBEL WITH A CAUSE – AUSTRALIA DAY

*Greg Cooney CM*

### **Introduction**

Maurice Joseph O'Reilly CM studied for the Priesthood at St Patrick's College, Maynooth, joined the Vincentians in 1887 and was ordained in 1890. After working in Sheffield, England for two years, he volunteered to come to Australia, sailing on RMS *Oroya* and arriving in Port Melbourne on 2 November 1892, — a day late for the Melbourne Cup.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of a short period in Ireland (from the end of 1914 until September 1915) he spent the rest of his priestly life in Australia.

He was a controversial figure in public affairs, Church matters and within his own Vincentian community. One could say that in the face of a battle looming, he, like the stock-horse in Paterson's "Man from Snowy River", snuffed it with delight. Frank King claims that "by instinct and tradition he was a fighter."<sup>2</sup> When he was recalled to Ireland at the end of 1914 not only were some of his Vincentian confrères relieved, but a number of his political opponents as well.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John P. Wilkinson CM. "O'Reilly, Maurice Joseph (1866-1933)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 11*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 94-95; F. D. King CM, *Memories of Maurice O'Reilly*, (Pahran, Victoria: Hall's Book Store, 1953), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> King, *Memories of Maurice O'Reilly*, 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> D. F. Bourke CM, *A History of the Vincentian Fathers in Australasia*, (Ashfield, NSW: Congregation of the Mission, c. 1982), 127-128; J. Wilkinson CM, "Father Maurice O'Reilly: A Controversial Priest." *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* Vol 7, part 3 (1983): 3-23, at 11.

## *Rebel with a Cause*

The Australian Church historian, Edmund Campion considers that “a good book is waiting to be written about Maurice O’Reilly.”<sup>4</sup> This short article is far more modest. It will present the contribution he made to the Australian national spirit, by examining some of his poems and songs, and reviewing his public quarrel with Australian Imperialists over Australia Day.

### **O’Reilly and Australian National Spirit**

Australia was proclaimed a commonwealth on 1 January 1901. Anticipating the event, Maurice O’Reilly wrote a poem, “Australia”, which was published in the July 1900 issue of *Austral Light*. It was reprinted in the *Echoes from St Stanislaus*’ for 1900.

#### Australia

Australia! We have heard thy voice  
Above each wretched brawl;  
The fiat of thy solemn choice  
Has stirred the hearts of all;  
And, like the prophet’s thrilling tones,  
Has swept the valley of dry bones –  
A resurrection call.

Too long we’d walked the road of life,  
Like strangers far apart,  
For selfish and ignoble strife  
Had sundered heart from heart;  
Now love is victor over feud,  
For blood is more than longitude,  
And Nature more than Art.

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<sup>4</sup> Edmund Campion, *A Place in the City*, (Ringwood: Victoria, Penguin: 1994), 140.

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The barriers are down—no man,  
Through pettiness or pride,  
Shall ever sever in his plan  
Whom God did not divide;  
The Southern Ocean circles all  
We want fenced in, our bound'ry wall,  
The billows of its tide.

The Motherland our aid enlists,  
To guard her deep array;  
Her camp is 'mid the Northern mists,  
Her van in far Cathay;  
Our place beseems the brave and young,  
The Empire's outpost furthest flung  
The very gates of day.

O, young and brave! O, morning land!  
Look Eastward o'er the sea!  
The sunset of the West is grand,  
But rosy dawns for thee.  
The rosiest dawn that poet sings,  
The dawn of bright, of glorious things,  
The day that is to be.

We may not see thy day—our lives  
Are written upon the sand;  
The flowing tide the ocean drives  
Is climbing up the strand;  
We may not see thy noontide—still  
We stand entranced on Phasga's hill,  
And view the promised land.

The country of the Golden Fleece,  
The land of bright sunshine,

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The lands where grow, with rich increase,  
The olive and the vine;  
The land with milk and honey blest  
May God forever send thee best  
Of corn and oil and wine.

And send thee more—great-hearted men,  
Ready to do or dare;  
To draw the sword, to wield the pen,  
To guide the rude ploughshare;  
And “valiant” women of the kind,  
By Solomon the wise defined,  
A knightly race to bear.

'Tis dead, the spirit that would fain  
To dark mistrust appeal;  
The land is girdled by a chain  
Of stronger links than steel.  
Welcome! the end of petty strife!  
Welcome! the grander, fuller life!  
Welcome! the Commonweal!<sup>5</sup>

The poem has some interesting features. While it places the emphasis squarely on the importance of Australia as a nation, it recognizes Australia as part of the wider British Empire. Nevertheless, the reasons for Australians to be patriotic are located, not in the exploits of the Empire, but in loyalty to their newly created nation, whose exploits, it is hoped, will be focussed on that love and respect for each other which will overcome strife and discord.

O'Reilly arrived at St Stanislaus' College at the beginning of 1900 to be promptly dubbed John Bull by the students who found him too

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<sup>5</sup> *Echoes from St Stanislaus'*, (1900): 105. Phasga's hill refers to the mountain from where Moses gazed at the Promised Land; cf. Deuteronomy 3:27.

aloof and imperious for their liking. The nick-name, with all its British overtones, displeased him, and his task, Dean of Discipline, he found irksome.<sup>6</sup> He also found himself in an environment which explicitly fostered Australian patriotism within the context of loyalty to the British Crown. The Crest of St Stanislaus' College, introduced by the Vincentians when they arrived in 1889, speaks loudly and clearly of a patriotism, not to Ireland, or to Britain, but to Australia. It depicted the, now iconic, symbols of Australia – the Emu and the Kangaroo – flanking the Book of Learning, surmounted by the Papal Tiara, over the motto *Nos autem in nomine Domini*.<sup>7</sup> The early editions of *Echoes from St Stanislaus*', in addition to the College Crest, also carry a five stanza poem by Mrs G. M. V. Kearney, explaining the significance of the symbols on the Crest.<sup>8</sup> The first stanza of the poem reads:

Behold the symbols of our trust emblended! –  
Knowledge, and Faith and Patriotism brave –  
Fast will we hold to them, till life be ended;  
In death to God, we'll bear them, through the Grave!  
Upon our hearts, the glorious motto graven –  
Within our souls, the noble crest upborne –  
Unsullied still, by dastard act or craven –  
Through life fore'er, with spotless honor borne  
By no false *ignes fatui* led, derided,  
Still true to God and to ourselves we'll be!  
By God informed – by Him sustained and guided –  
“Nos autem in nomine Domini.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> King, *Memories of Maurice O'Reilly*, 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> The motto is taken from the latin version of Psalm 19, verse 8. The crest was designed by Fr Joseph Lowe CM, by adapting the Crest of another Vincentian school, Castleknock College, Dublin. Lowe simply replaced the Cross and Shamrock with the Emu and the Kangaroo.

<sup>8</sup> *Echoes from St Stanislaus*', (1894): 2. Mrs Kearney was the wife of Mr Simon Kearney, an ex-student of the College.

<sup>9</sup> *Ignis fatuus* is the latin term for the phosphorescence associated with marsh gas. In this context it could be rendered as “deluding lights”.

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The second and third stanzas of the poem deal with the pursuit of wisdom and science, and the fourth with the compatibility of Faith, Learning and Science. The fifth, and final, stanza returns to the theme of patriotism:

With noble brow, and knightly air advancing,  
Who, – for his Queen – claims like allegiance here,  
His sword upborne – his spear and armour glancing  
Fair Austral’s emblems on his shield appear? –  
'Tis Patriotism, the trio’s chosen champion –  
The knight whose sword still leaps at their command,  
To guard the right – to slash foul foes like rampion –  
To fight for Learning, Faith and Fatherland,  
Our hearts beat high to ’list beneath his banner –  
Still true to God and to ourselves we’ll be –  
“Nos autem in nomine Domini.”

The object of the patriotism is Learning, Faith and Fatherland (Australia). Patriotic sentiments in favour of the British crown are present, but muted. Given this atmosphere of Australian patriotism it is not at all surprising that in the *Echoes from St Stanislaus’* for 1901 we find: “the music of the Australian National Anthem, sung in St Stanislaus’ for the first time at the end of our Midwinter Entertainment, was composed by Mr J. M. Stevens, an ex-student of the college”.<sup>10</sup> Its tone was religious, attributing the blessing of nationhood to God’s

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<sup>10</sup> *Echoes from St Stanislaus’* (1901): 138, 148-149. Stevens composed his “Australian National Anthem” in 1900, to lyrics written by W. J. Meedan. They read: “ 1. O Thou whose arms hath for our fathers fought, Whose guiding hand their sons hath hither brought, Lead onward till Australia’s land shall rise a greater nation ’neath the southern skies. 2. With bounteous hand our fields of plenty bless, Increase our flocks, our homes with peace possess, Make wise our rulers and in wisdom’s ways guide Thou our feet to Thine eternal praise.” The lyrics and music of Stevens’ anthem can be found at: <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an6931354>>, 10 July 2006.

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guiding hand. O'Reilly had been a staff member at St Stanislaus' College until a few weeks before its first performance there, and spoke of it some years later as a "fine composition."

O'Reilly considered that Australian youth were quite unpatriotic, but that the fault for this lay not with them. An unsigned article, entitled "Australia Day", in the *Echoes from St Stanislaus'* had this to say in 1911:

Australians are proverbially deficient in patriotism. It is not quite their fault. They have been systematically taught the virtue of self-depreciation, until they have attained the perfection of refusing to buy Australian boots unless they are branded "American" or Australian wool unless it comes from England. No people ever became great in that way.

Australia Day was wanted to tell our lads and lasses of the grand country that it is theirs, and of the glorious future before them, if only they are true to themselves. We are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. It was a treat worth going a long way to see when the lads of St Stanislaus' in military formation saluted, as they marched past the central door, the Australian flag raised up against it. And when the President, surrounded by all the members of the staff, spoke to the lads of their sunny land, and the message borne on the winds by her flag, of their duty to love that flag, and if necessary, to fight beneath it, or even find the last rest beneath its folds, it was plain from eyes that were wet with genuine emotion that there is hope yet for Australia, and that jingoism is simply dying a hard death. The final scene was equally inspiring, when the flag was flown from the flagstaff surmounting the central tower, and the lads again gave the military

salute, and wound up proceedings by singing the National Hymn.<sup>11</sup>

The jingoism to which O'Reilly was referring was not associated with "Australia Day" – 26 January, the day on which Australia was claimed for the British Crown. Despite the efforts of the Australian Natives' Association (a conservative group formed in 1871) to promote Australia Day, it was given only a desultory ceremony or two, with very little public participation or support. The Trade Unions in New South Wales opposed any effort to celebrate 26 January, as did the Labor Government in New South Wales. The comment made in the *Echoes from St Stanislaus'* expressed a widely-held view: "the truth [is] that in the anniversary of the first convict settlement there was not much to enthuse about."<sup>12</sup> The major celebration being touted at the time was Empire Day and it was the jingoism associated with it that he had in his sights.

### **Empire Day and Australian National Spirit**

As a child growing up in the 1950s I remember Empire Day, 24 May, as "Cracker Night". We lived on a farm and it was the only time during the year that we were allowed to light fires, let off sky-rockets and terrorize the farm animals with what we used to call "double bungers" – a firework in the shape of a stick of dynamite, which had sufficient explosive power to seriously maim if carelessly used. Weeks before we started building the bonfire and praying that it would not rain – an exercise of piety which our parents barely tolerated at a time of the year when rain was needed to ensure good crops. Our mounting anticipation was matched only by maternal dread of a lost eye, hand or limb. She hated "Cracker Night" not merely for the dangers that it held,

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<sup>11</sup> *Echoes from St Stanislaus'*, (1911): 43. O'Reilly was the President of St Stanislaus' College at that time, and the sentiments expressed by its annual magazine would have reflected his own convictions.

<sup>12</sup> *Echoes from St Stanislaus'* (1911): 43.

but also because, she stoutly maintained, it would upset the hens so much that they would stop laying eggs for weeks. Few knew the meaning of Empire Day and even fewer cared.

It was not always the case that few cared about Empire Day. The idea of celebrating the splendour and achievements of the British Empire on the birthday of Queen Victoria was launched in Canada by Clementina Fessenden in 1897. After Victoria's death on 22 January 1901 the idea was espoused by the British Empire League and the influential Reginald Brabazon, the 12<sup>th</sup> Earl of Meath, assisted by the founder of the Boy Scouts Movement, Lord Baden-Powell. Both considered that the youth of the Empire, having grown flabby and self-indulgent, needed to be reminded that the Empire builders had been made of sterner stuff. A chapter of the League was established in Sydney in 1901 under the presidency of Rev. Francis Bertie Boyce, the Rector of St Mark's Anglican Church in Redfern. By 1905, after the Prime Minister of the time, George Reid, had argued persuasively for it at the Premiers' Conference, Empire Day was established in Australia.<sup>13</sup>

Not all agreed, and they did care about it. On 18 May 1905 the Sydney *Bulletin* argued passionately against Empire Day, referring to it as the feast day of St Jingo which would see our children singing "hymns of blood and battle in glory of a country which is not their own, and thus be taught indirectly, to neglect and despise the land which is their heritage and trust." Furthermore, the *Bulletin* contended, it would weaken true patriotism for Australia because British Imperialism "with its ideals of war, conquest, pillage and servile labour" would replace Australian nationalism which "stands for democratic equality, for the fostering of home industries; for such extension of State Socialism as will give to the people the control of great national services and

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<sup>13</sup>Stewart Firth and Jeanette Hoorn, "From Empire Day to Cracker Night", in *Australian Popular Culture*, edited by Peter Spearritt and David Walker. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1979), 17-38, at 18-19. Australia lagged behind other parts of the Empire – Empire Day was established in New Zealand by 1903, and in England by 1904.

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monopolies; for making the hire worthy of the labourer, for white race purity.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Bulletin* was fearful that the establishment of an Imperial Council would erode Australia’s independence, and make it much easier for the Imperialists in Australia, who were, in its view, far more interested in securing cheap labour from Asia, than they were in the welfare of Australia. The *Bulletin* derided them:

It is perhaps, mainly the hope of securing servile labor that makes the Fatman in Australia today, so ardent an Imperialist. He sees the result of Imperial success in South Africa in the hordes of Chinese slaves packed in the coolie-ships for the Rand and hopes for a like happy result here. As he sings of the “dear old flag,” in his thoughts it is waving over a slave-ship, and the “mother-country” is the country which can take the rule of Australia out of the hands of Australian citizens, and give him cheap Japanese coolies for the coal-mine, factory and field. Whilst Australia is self-governing and independent, he knows Australia will be white. Let Australia be induced to give up her self-government and become a partner in, and obedient to, a Council of the Empire, which is mostly nigger Empire, and he hopes that cheap colored labor will flow to these shores. ...<sup>15</sup>

The editorial policy of the *Bulletin* scorned class differentiation and Imperial jingoism, but was not above employing its own version thereof in defence of a “clean and white” Australia:

The *Bulletin* therefore in all seriousness urges those Australian parents who are Australians first – who are

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<sup>14</sup> *Bulletin*, 36 (Thursday May 18, 1905): 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

earnest in their belief that the one sure duty of the people holding this lonely outpost in the asiatic seas to keep it free and clean and white – to gather their children round them on May 24, and tell them of their own land. Tell them how, by destiny of Providence, from a bad and tainted beginning, a little free people grew up here, washed by the clean seas, purified by the breath of the gum forests. How, with the knowledge abroad of great open fields here; where no man was landlord or master, and neither wood nor wood game had been divinely set apart for squire or parson, and hats were touched to none except in genuine chivalry and respect; the best of the men from England, Scotland, Ireland, and many other European land come to Australia, seeking freedom and scope for manly self-respect. ... How it is the duty of every Australian child to grow up to love his own land, where life is free and no man is born duke or lord and any may look to rule who has the power within him. How of all things it is needful to keep the white blood pure, else will Australia come down to the despised ranks of the outcasts ... So much surely the Australian parent may tell his child without disloyalty to any Empire idea that is worth an honest man's thought. But so much he cannot say without the deepest hostility to the ideas of those who will assemble Australian children in the schools on May 24<sup>th</sup> to celebrate Jingo-Imperialism.<sup>16</sup>

### **Catholics and Empire Day**

In 1905 Socialism and Catholicism were not happy bedfellows. Church leaders had issued a number of trenchant statements critical of Socialism, and the Socialists made it clear that, at their meetings, dogs

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

and God were to be left outside.<sup>17</sup> Wary of being associated with the socialist opinions expressed by the *Bulletin*, coupled with its overt racism, Church leaders had little to say about Empire Day. Nevertheless, by 1908, that had changed and the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Moran, added his voice to the debate. While in Brisbane for the laying of the foundation-stone for the Mater Misericordiae Hospital he gave an interview to a reporter from the *Courier Mail*. When asked if he had anything to say in reference to Empire Day he responded:

I look upon the Empire Day celebration as out of place. What we want is Australian celebrations. The 24<sup>th</sup> of May is a grand day, but there should be an Australian Day—not an Empire Day. We want a national day to which every one can contribute. The organisers of Empire Day are really antagonistic to the best interests of Australia.<sup>18</sup>

Moran's opposition to Empire Day, as expressed in this interview, was mostly for political reasons: he considered that those who promoted it had little interest in the genuine welfare of Australia. But there were also other reasons why Empire Day did not sit easily with Catholics:

Empire Day was a very Protestant day. There were services in Protestant churches; there were Protestant ministers at school assemblies; the British Empire League, the day's chief promoter was a militantly Protestant body. Such overt Protestantism was only one of the reasons why Catholics remained less than enthusiastic about the day. There were, too, deeper, ethnic reasons why Irish-Australians did not easily join in lauding the Empire. These reasons were expressed in a poem by the prominent

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<sup>17</sup> *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, Volume II 1884-1968, selected and edited by Patrick O'Farrell with the assistance of Deidre O'Farrell, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 161-175 gives a selection of Church statements made on Socialism in 1905.

<sup>18</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, (28 May 1908), 17.

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Vincentian priest, Maurice O'Reilly. It is called, "Ireland and Empire Day":

Shall *we* rejoice, in whom the Irish blood  
Rolls like a lava-torrent as the flood  
Of burning memories sweeps o'er the brain?  
Shall *we* rejoice, while our dear motherland,  
Dearer to us than any other land,  
Wears yet a chain?  
By heaven, not so.<sup>19</sup>

From 17-20 January 1911 the first Catholic Educational Conference of New South Wales was held at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. On the opening day O'Reilly addressed the assembled teaching Brothers and Sisters from around the State about educating children and young people to be patriotic. The Proceedings of the Conference summarises his speech in these words:

... It was true that their children were not Irish—they were Australian—but everything that was best and noblest in Australia was Irish. ... Hence he would like to see St Patrick's Day observed right through their schools with as great enthusiasm as possible, and that the sacred fire enkindled that day not subside during the year. Some times they were reproached regarding their want of patriotism. In this country patriotism, unfortunately, seemed to be identified with the efforts of the British Empire League. He hoped they were not unduly ungrateful for the benefits that came to them as citizens of the Empire, but he thought, patriotism, like charity, began

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<sup>19</sup> Edmund Campion, *The Meaning of Dr Mannix*. Aquinas Memorial Lecture 1983, (Brisbane, Qld: Aquinas Library, 1983), 5-6. For the full text of the poem, see: Maurice O'Reilly, *Poems*, (London: Sands and Company, c. 1919), 19-20.

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at home, and their children should be taught to love the country of their birth, which was the essential idea of patriotism. The British Empire League endeavoured to turn their love towards England, and to instil in them an admiration of her policy. He did not say an Australia Day should be disassociated from the glories of the Empire, but it must be primarily Australian. He said it would be well if May 24, the Feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, was in the future known as “Australia Day” in the catholic schools and celebrated as such. It would give a fillip to the patriotism of their youth. Such a celebration would be a magnificent answer to the calumniators who taunted them for their want of public spirit, isolation of policy and want of patriotism. ...<sup>20</sup>

The Proceedings then notes that Cardinal Moran moved a resolution “that with a view to impressing on our children their indebtedness to Ireland’s national apostle an effort should be made by the teachers to celebrate with befitting splendour St Patrick’s Day; and that as a help to the cultivation of the patriotic spirit, the 24<sup>th</sup> of May should be formally set apart as ‘Australia Day’ under the auspices of Our Lady Help of Christians.”<sup>21</sup> The Sisters of St Joseph then presented a written submission supporting O’Reilly’s views and the Cardinal’s motion. One is left with the impression that an amount of careful preparation had been done before the Conference to ensure the outcome desired by Moran who, it seems, had enlisted the aid of O’Reilly to promote it.

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<sup>20</sup> “Rev. M. J. O’Reilly speaking at the Catholic Education Conference of NSW, 17 January 1911” in *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, Volume II, 121-122.

<sup>21</sup> *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, Volume II, 122.

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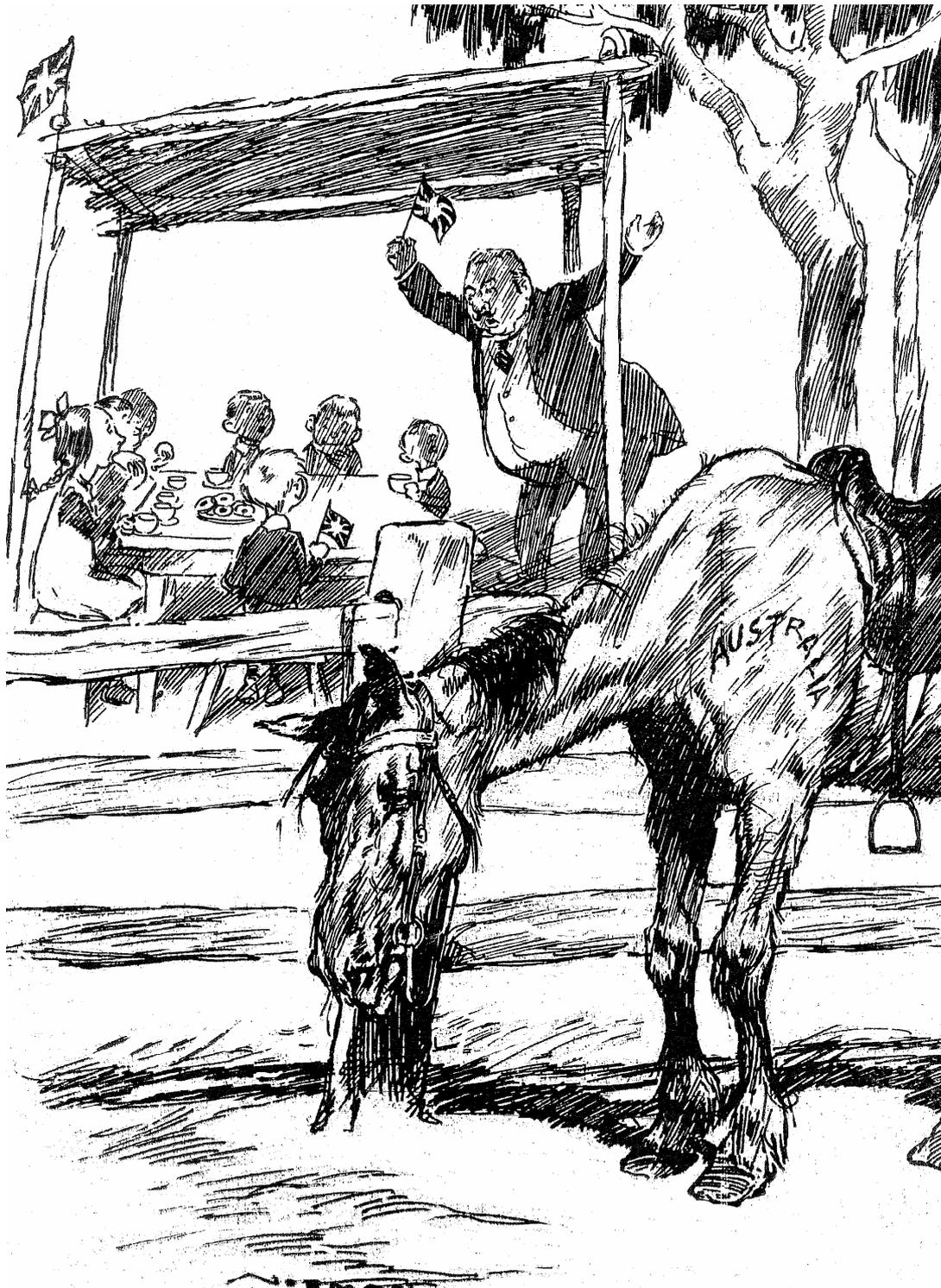


ON EMPIRE DAY

HIS EMINENCE: "Come with me, and you may wave this flag"

YOUNG AUSTRALIA: "Why don't you come with me? You must be lonely. You've got a good flag, but this is my flag's day."

(Cartoon depicting Cardinal Moran in *Daily Telegraph*, (25 May 1911): 10.)



**FORGOTTEN**

Cartoon by Norman Lindsay in *The Bulletin*, 32(1 June 1911): 5

It was fortuitous that the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians, the patroness of Australia, fell on 24 May. The feast, having been established in 1815, was chosen as the patronal feast for Australia at the First Provincial Synod, held in Sydney in 1844. Although Queen Victoria was already on the throne of England, it seems unlikely that there was any direct connection between the choice of this feast and her birthday. As a celebration within the catholic community, it predated Empire Day by more than fifty years. Catholics could, as a result, plausibly maintain that their boycott of Empire Day was motivated by the highest of reasons, and could not be attributed to any supposed ill-will they might have towards the British Empire.

**“God bless our lovely morning Land”**

O'Reilly, at the behest of Bishop Carroll of Lismore, wrote to the Cardinal with the suggestion that it would be good if Catholics could take the initiative with regard to a National Hymn which would further make the point that Australia, not England, should be put first.

St Stanislaus' College,  
Bathurst  
April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1911.

My Lord Cardinal

Some time ago, I got a letter from Dr Carroll of Lismore, in which His Lordship told me that he was anxious to do something this year in the way of celebrating Australia Day and in this connection, asked me to write some verses that might be suitable for the occasion, as well as a melody to which they could be sung.

Up to a few day ago, the found of my inspiration was completely dry, but since then I have lucubrated a hymn, which whether it comes from

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Parnassus or not, “viderint sapientes”. At any rate I enclose it, thinking that if I had the hall-mark of your Eminence’s approval, it would be given a wider sphere of usefulness.

I have often felt that it was very desirable that we Catholics should have in use among our own people through the schools, a national hymn. Later on, we shall once more seem sectional if we object to one that may have set upon it the seal of public approval, but whose jingoistic or non-religious character may give it but scant claim upon our respect. But if we enter the arena first, we shall again have the credit of giving the lead in Australian Patriotism.

I have sent a copy today to Dr Carroll, and I have written a melody as well, which will be sent to him, and to Your Eminence, if so desired, once it has been arranged.

I feel that I have no claim to distinction as laureate, and I know I need an apology for intruding on this domain at all, but Dr Carroll’s invitation gave me courage, and I should feel honoured indeed, if, pending the arrival of a real bard, any verses of mine should be thought worthy to help the old Faith, or the new Fatherland.

I have the honour to remain, my Lord Cardinal,  
Your Eminence’s most obedient servant,  
M. J. O’Reilly C.M.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> M. J. O’Reilly CM to Cardinal Moran, 29 April 1911. Archives of St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney.

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The jingoism to which O'Reilly objected can be savoured from the lyrics of some of the songs that the *Commonwealth School Paper* suggested for use so that imperial patriotism might be fostered.<sup>23</sup> One was "The Sea is England's Glory", whose first verse asserts:

The sea is England's glory, the bounding waves her throne  
For ages bright in story, the ocean is her own.  
In war, the first and fearless; her standard leads the brave;  
In peace she reigns so peerless, the Empress of the wave.<sup>24</sup>

Another of the recommended songs, also extolling Britain's mastery of the sea, had a more religious tone. Its first verse solemnly proclaimed:

When Britain first at Heaven's command,  
Arose from out the azure main,  
Arose, arose from out the azure main;  
This was the charter, the charter of the land,  
And guardian Angels sang this strain:  
Rule Britannia! Britannia rules the waves,  
Britons never will be slaves.<sup>25</sup>

Australian composers echoed similar sentiments. The second and fourth (both thankfully now forgotten) verses of "Advance Australia Fair" instructed us thus:

When gallant Cook from Albion sail'd to trace wide oceans o'er,  
True British courage bore him on till he landed on our shore;

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<sup>23</sup> Edmund Campion, *Australian Catholics*, (Ringwood, Victoria: Viking, 1987), 69.

<sup>24</sup> "The Sea is England's Glory", words by J. W Lake, composed by Stephen Glover. (Melbourne: Allan and Co, [191-?]) at: <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an6487663-s4-e-cd>>, 10 July 2006.

<sup>25</sup> "Rule Britannia", words by ? Thompson, composed by Dr Arne. (Melbourne: Allan's, [between 1900 and 1915]), <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an5630816-s2-e-cd>>, 10 July 2006.

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There he raised old England's flag, the standard of the brave;  
With all her faults we love her still: Britannia rule the waves!  
In joyful strains then let us sing: Advance Australia Fair!

Should foreign foe o'er sight our coast or dare a foot to land,  
We'll rouse to arms like sires of yore to guard our native strand;  
Britannia then shall surely know beyond wide ocean's roll,  
Her sons in fair Australia's land still keep a British soul!  
In joyful strains then let us sing: Advance Australia Fair!<sup>26</sup>

O'Reilly objected strenuously, not only to the jingoism, but even more forcefully to the religious justifications offered in defence of the exploits of the Empire. In his poem, "Ireland and Empire Day", he caustically asked:

Must *we* rejoice, because tyrannic might  
Seems to have triumphed over every right,  
Behind which stands the Providence of God?

...

But to rejoice that England's robber claw  
Has feed with people her capacious maw,  
Raising the while her pious eyes to heaven;  
To cheer because she has crushed the brave and free  
Who, in the sacred cause of liberty  
Had nobly striven –  
Dear Lord, not yet!<sup>27</sup>

His answer was his National Hymn, "Australia".<sup>28</sup> The manuscript version, in O'Reilly's own hand, can be found in the *Echoes from St*

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<sup>26</sup>"Advance Australia Fair" by P[eter] D[odds] McCormick, (Sydney: W. H. Paling and Co., [19--?]) at <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an6012195-s1-e-cd>>, 17 July 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Maurice O'Reilly, *Poems*, (London: Sands and Company, c. 1919), 19, 20.

<sup>28</sup> The lyrics were published in *Austral Light*, vol. 12, no. 6 (1 June 1911): 427-428 and in Maurice O'Reilly, *Poems*, 159-160. The manuscript musical

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*Stanislaus*' for 1911, and there he notes that his "melody is intended only as an alternative to Mr J. M. Steven's fine composition, already published."

Australian National Hymn

God bless our lovely morning land!  
God keep her with enfolding hand  
Close to His side.  
While booms the distant battle's roar  
From out some rude, barbaric shore.  
In blessed peace for evermore,  
There to abide.

God guard Australia! In vain  
She's circled by th' inviolate main,  
Unless His word,  
The warrant of His Providence  
Speak louder than the sense of things,  
Proving a mightier defence  
Than lance or sword.

Land of the dawning! Lo! at last,  
The shadows of the night are past;  
Across the sea,  
Is spreading far the purple light,  
The lonely mountain peaks are bright,  
And visions crowd upon the sight  
Of days to be.

The future is thine own, loved land,

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setting can be found in *Echoes from St Stanislaus*' (1911): 16. The musical setting published in Melbourne by W. L. Linehan, in 1912 can be found at <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an8414556>>, 17 July 2006. It was also published in Sydney in 1912 by E.J. Dwyer, and later by W.H.Paling.

*Rebel with a Cause*

The warm of heart, the stout of hand,  
The noble mind,  
Shall build a Nation truly great,  
With Christ for King; where love not hate,  
Shall be the charter of the State  
To all mankind.

Love lives in promise elsewhere  
But we are brothers—in the care  
Of one birthright;  
One God above, one home below,  
One front against our country's foe,  
And—if need be—one ringing blow,  
The wrong to smite.

Australia! On the wide sea-way,  
Where swing the shining gates of day,  
'Twi't new and old,  
God raised a throne and spread a feast,  
Gave thee the lordship of the East,  
Made thee His prophet, and His priest  
To years untold.

Pure be thy hands and cleansed oft,  
That fain would clasp, or hold aloft  
The labarum;  
And touched those lips with altar-fire,  
That seek the nations to inspire  
With faith and love, and high desire  
For things to come.

God bless thee, lovely morning land,  
God keep thee with enfolding hand  
Close to His side!  
Make thee the home of liberty,

*Rebel with a Cause*

While sweeps the Murray to the sea,  
And lifts a proud front dauntlessly,  
The great Divide.

The National Hymn was first sung publicly on 24 May 1911 at St Stanislaus' College and, on the same day, at St Mary's Cathedral, along with the "Australian National Anthem" by J. M. Stevens and the hymn "Lady of Our Help".<sup>29</sup> It contains eight verses, of which, according to O'Reilly's advice, "the first, fifth and eighth verses will be found to be the most suitable, though the expression marks would vary with each." The tone of the hymn is explicitly religious – only in the third verse is there no mention of God or of faith – and locate, the first and last verses, the blessings of peace and freedom as gifts of God. With the possible exception of sixth verse, which speaks of God making Australia "His prophet and His priest" and giving Australia "lordship of the East" the lyrics are humble.<sup>30</sup> Rather than lauding the achievements of the nation they give a charter for becoming a great nation: trust in divine Providence (verse 2); the exercise of love not hate (verse 4); respect for the unity of all humankind under God (verse 5); and worship of God, the source of one's strength and hope (verse 7).

In his earlier poem, "Australia" (1900), there were references to the Empire. There are no references to it in the National Hymn, and in a poem, "Our Flag", (written in the period 1911-1912) the sole mention of the Empire is the tart reference to the Union Jack on the Australian flag as "the crimson stain" under which the brave and free were crushed. In this poem, as in the National Hymn, armed force was to be employed only in the defence of one's country or of the powerless.

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<sup>29</sup> *Echoes from St Stanislaus'*, (1911): 43; *Sydney Morning Herald*, (25 May 1911): 10.

<sup>30</sup> The reference to Australia's lordship of the East reflects Cardinal Moran's conviction that Australia should be a key country in the Pacific area, both politically and religiously. Cf. *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, Volume II, 122; *Daily Telegraph*, (24 May 1911): 9; *Sydney Morning Herald*, (25 May 1911): 10.

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Our Flag

Lift up the starry flag! Its blue  
Was caught from heaven's azure dome;  
was there its twinkling star-buds grew;  
Fling out its folds! 'tis nearer home,  
When o'er the cloud-wrack floating high,  
Its silver stars regain the sky.

Lift up the flag! 'tis yours and mine;  
It stands for all we prize on earth:  
The teeming land of oil and wine,  
The motherland that gave us birth—  
The roof that shelters from above,  
The hearth below, the friends we love.

Flag of our land! The crimson stain  
Has never made your cheeks to blush;  
You never fluttered o'er the slain,  
They never bore you who would crush  
The brave and free. Ne'er may the weak  
In vain your strong protection seek!

O dear blue flag! the days are ill,  
We know not what the future holds;  
But this we know—that, come what will,  
We'd rather die beneath your folds  
Than hear the shout of victory  
From foes of yours, by land or sea.

O can it be, the men are born,  
Who yet shall see that flag blood-red,  
Shall see it riddled, rent and torn,  
Shall see it wrap the southern dead?

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Before the Lord shall bring the day,  
May we be sleeping 'neath the clay!

But should it please the Lord of hosts,  
To try us in the fire of war,  
Should enemies invade our coasts,  
That standard, gleaming like a star,  
Shall light the bravest men there are,  
Whether on land, or yet on sea,  
To stainless death, or victory.<sup>31</sup>

O'Reilly was determined to emphasise Australian patriotism. As his elimination of any reference to the Empire shows, he had no time for those who looked to England as a source of national identity and pride. He also took positive action to reinforce loyalty to Australia, publishing, in 1914, a poem, "The Queen of the South: The Australian's Toast", which he later set to music to be sung on festive gathering of all Australians.<sup>32</sup> Its final chorus clearly indicates his intention of eliminating any vestiges of patriotism to the Empire. In place of the expected words, "God save the King", they sang instead:

"God guard our Motherland!  
Then up and sing, till the welkin ring:  
God save our own Australia!"

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<sup>31</sup> *Echoes from St Stanislaus*, (1912): frontispiece. It is also published in *A Century of Echoes: one hundred years of Echoes from St Stanislaus' College*, edited by Theo Barker, (Bathurst: Crawford House Press, 1989), 101.

<sup>32</sup> Maurice O'Reilly, "The Queen of the South: The Australian's Toast", *Austral Light*, vol. 15, no. 2 (February 1914): 97-98; Maurice O'Reilly, *Poems*, 94-95. For the musical setting see: "Queen of the South (The Australian's Toast). A Song for all Festive Gatherings of Australians", words and music by Maurice O'Reilly, (Sydney: Nicholson and Co., 1924).

He clearly intended “Queen of the South” to be an alternative to other “festive, toasting songs” used at the time which expressed sentiments in favour of the Empire.<sup>33</sup>

The decision taken that, as from 1911, catholic schools would boycott Empire Day celebrations and, in its stead, celebrate “Australia Day” was bound to cause controversy, and O’Reilly’s stance was about to be put to the test.

### **The Toady Press**

Fighter by instinct and tradition, he readied himself for the battle with what he termed “the toady Sydney press”. On the Monday preceding Wednesday’s celebration of Empire Day, he wrote to the papers announcing that at St Stanislaus’ College there would be no celebration of Empire Day, and that the College would take no part in Empire Day celebrations in Bathurst. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was quick to respond. On the following day, 23 May 1911, its leading article, under the header “Empire Day” pointedly reminded its readers that:

... There could be no more striking proof of the growth of the Imperial sentiment than the unanimity with which this recently established festival has been received alike in Great Britain and in the Dominions. ... There is no doubt, therefore, that Empire Day has established its claim to recognition. Australians, just as much as Canadians, or New Zealanders, or South Africans, are proud of their place in the Empire, and proud of the racial history that

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<sup>33</sup> Examples are: “Awake! Awake! Australia!” by P. D. McCormick, (Sydney: W. H. Paling and Co.: [191?], available: <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an10414500-s2-e>>, 17 July 2006, and “Australia”, words by Wilton Grey, composed by Joe Slater, (New York: Hamilton S. Gordon, [1906]. Available: <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.mus-an11012227-s2-e>>, 17 July 2006. Slater wrote many such patriotic songs.

lies behind it. No less than any others do they earnestly desire that the great fabric of free States which has been woven out of so much heroism and self-sacrifice so much labor and so much pains, shall remain one and indissoluble, coming as the years go on, to be more and more the type of a new Imperialism whose ideal is the service of man. That is an ideal which no one can afford to despise, and we are glad to think that there are few who despise it.<sup>34</sup>

Having thus established itself on the high moral ground, the *Sydney Morning Herald* went on to decry Cardinal Moran's attempt "to separate his people from their share in Imperial sentiment" and to maintain that the Catholics' decision not take part because they had a Church festival on the same day was "a childish and gratuitous insult to the Australian Commonwealth". The article went on to assert that the real reason was to "stir up religious or racial antagonism". Consoling its readers that the stability of the Empire would not be shaken by these tactics, the editor rhetorically asked if Cardinal Moran expects "the walls of Jericho to fall at his trumpet?", asserting that "the age of such miracles is past, and the only result can be to bring the Roman Catholic Church into contempt." The article concludes by calling on the populace to protest against the Church's arrogance, bombast and "tactics of this contemptible kind."

One has to go to another Sydney newspaper to discover what O'Reilly had said in order to so anger the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. On 23 May, under the headlines of "Australia not England" – "An opponent of Empire Day" – "Aggressive Blatant Jingoistic" – "Roman Catholic Priest's Views", the *Daily Telegraph* reported as follows:

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<sup>34</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, (23 May 1911), 6.

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BATHURST, Monday. – It was announced today that St Stanislaus' Roman Catholic College will take no part in the Empire Day celebrations in Bathurst.

To-night, Very Rev. M. J. O'Reilly, president of the college, and Provincial of the Vincentian Fathers in New South Wales, in a letter to the press, puts forward what he describes as "weighty reasons" for the attitude of the college.

He states: – "Indeed, we have some little ground for suspecting that many of those who celebrate Empire day throughout the State generally would be much surprised if they were aware of the true nature of this movement. The toady Sydney press has persistently tried to make Empire Day – which in England itself is a party question, to which the present English Prime Minister refused to give official recognition, and which the London County Council, as long as it remained liberal, refused to observe in its schools—our national holiday. We will have none of it. In the minds of millions of Englishmen it stands for everything that is aggressive, that is blatant, that is jingoistic in Imperial policy. We are not forgetful of the blessings of Empire, nor of the protection of the flag, but, little as we admire Kipling, flag-flapping seems to us less appropriate on Empire Day than his fine Recessional Hymn, 'Lest We Forget.' We know your Empire builders and appreciate them accordingly. They are the men who crushed, on behalf of Chinese labor, the Boer Republics in South Africa. They were the organisers of the peaceful mission to Thibet, on which the peacemakers were accompanied by guns. They are the men who have cruelly oppressed and persecuted their fellow subjects in Ireland for the sake of an alien oligarchy. They are the land sharks of the world who make use of people as pawns in the

international games and sweep nations, when ripe for spoliation, into the maw of capitalism. Besides, there is no use beginning at the wrong end if young Australians are conspicuously deficient in patriotism. Possibly it is only in the white heat of some great national emotion that State jealousies and parochialism can be welded to the love of our common country, but we must begin right here. The affections commence within and radiate outwards, it is in this sense that patriotism, like charity, begins at home. The man who is bad son to his mother will never be a loyal citizen to the State. Australia, not England, is our children's motherland. Her they should love with the best of their affection. Her flag they must cherish beyond any flag that flies. We make no disguise. The flag of Australian nationhood comes first with us, and on May 24, at St Stanislaus', at all events, the first lesson of the day shall be devotion unto death, if needs be, to our children's lovely morning land, and the flag that they shall look up to with wistful eyes and greet with exuberant affection, shall be the flag of their young nation bespangled with the stars of the balmy south. When some attempt has been made to attend to this first duty, and the Catholics alone are seriously attempting to do so, then we may emphasise the undoubted obligation of our children to the Empire, but not till then."<sup>35</sup>

Like his counterpart in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* had his own comments on O'Reilly's views. In the leading article he excoriated O'Reilly, suggesting that if he and his ilk wished to be so offensive to the nation (England) which protects them,

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<sup>35</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, (23 May 1911): 7. On the following day, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, (24 May 1911), 14 printed a slightly abridged version of O'Reilly's views, under the headlines: "Roman Catholic Indictment"—"Land Sharks of the World"—"Views of Fr M. J. O'Reilly CM".

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it would be better if they went elsewhere to live, such as the United States, where their views would be less offensive. He went on:

It is time to point out also that many of the people who use bitter language against the Empire, and who, we are convinced, misrepresent the feelings of many of those who belong to their Church, are not Australians at all, in spite of their boisterous assertions of their Australian patriotism. They were born and bred far from Australia, and no amount of shouting “Australia for ever” will disguise the potent fact that they are seeking to introduce into this country, political grievances, which should have no place here. Australian patriotism is too pure and precious a thing to be desecrated by being used to further the end of bigotry and rancor. And those who know Australia best—and longest—know that its people are proud to belong to the British Empire. The present Minister for Defence, speaking in London three days ago, said: “We recognise that we must for many years depend on Britain’s grand old navy, but we also recognise that it is not manly to take all the benefits of that navy and do nothing ourselves to assist it. These are the sentiments and ideas dominating not only my party, but all.” And that authoritative utterance is a sufficient answer to Cardinal Moran and the Rev. M. J. O’Reilly.<sup>36</sup>

In Bathurst the local press was equally outraged, regretting this counter-movement to parochially place Australia before the Empire and lamenting O’Reilly’s “vituperative utterances” and his unfair and unjust denunciation of the Empire as unworthy “of the head of a splendid seminary.” The editor dismissed O’Reilly’s claim that Empire Day is not universally supported in England with the comment that

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<sup>36</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, (23 May 1911): 6.

neither is Home Rule unanimously accepted in Ireland. The Editor then delivered this stern admonition:

Further (and this is what is objected to emphatically) Father O'Reilly will still inculcate into his pupils the love of Ireland, whilst he denies the young Australians of English, Scottish and Welsh descent the inculcation of the same affection **for the land of their fathers.**

It is hoped that all Roman Catholic priests who are heads of seminaries in Australia will not introduce the same amount of vitriol in to their sentiments as does this Vincentian brother, who might have remembered that it is not under every flag that such sentiments could be expressed with impunity.<sup>37</sup>

The following day the *Bathurst Times* carried a report of comments made by the Anglican Dean of Bathurst, Very Rev. Marriott, chiding those who “wished to get rid of the Empire in some way or other – to pull it to pieces, to do a lot of mischief ” by wanting to have an ‘Australia Day’ and not an ‘Empire Day’. The Rev. Marriott was of the opinion that “the best way to have an Australian (sic) Day is to celebrate an Empire Day. If you keep Empire Day as you ought, you keep an Australia Day, and if you keep an Australia Day as you ought, you keep an Empire Day, too.” He then proceeded to teach his juvenile audience (an overflowing one, according to the *Bathurst Times*) this little poem:

Australian boys and girls are we;  
We love our country, fair and free.  
We love our British Empire too;  
And will our duty strive to do.

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<sup>37</sup> *Bathurst Times*, (24 May 1911): 2. Emphasis in the original.

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That we may help her worthily;  
God help us brave and true to be.  
May righteousness and peace extend  
Throughout her realms, and never end.<sup>38</sup>

The contrast between the sentiments expressed by this and his own National Hymn is stark, but O'Reilly ignored it in his retort on the following day, taking a swipe at the "Bathurst Establishment" instead.

Dear Sir: – When I read the speeches delivered in Bathurst yesterday in connection with Empire Day, and in particular, the speech of one turgid orator, who asserted that those who were opposed to Empire Day "want to get rid of the Empire in some way or other" I could not help feeling that there was some point in the advice of the speaker who followed him: "Don't be bigots."

As something like Egyptian darkness seems to have covered the land regarding the English opinion on Empire Day I will undertake to give a mild surprise to some of our critics. The man whom I intend to quote is not an Irish Catholic priest, but the Right Hon. G. W. E. Russell, nephew of a former Prime Minister of England, grandson of the Duke of Bedford, Ex-Under-Secretary of State for India, member of Her Majesty's Privy Council, and lay-reader of the Church of England. That ought to be "class" enough for Bathurst.

Now the whole quotation suits so delightfully our local conditions that I should be suspected of manufacturing it—nothing is too bad for those Jesuitical papists—if I did not give the reference. It is taken from Sketches and

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<sup>38</sup> *Bathurst Times*, (25 May 1911): 2.

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Snapshots (Russell) London, George Bell and Sons, 1910, Chap. on St. George and Shakespeare. Here it is: “Year by year that good citizen Lord Meath tries to kindle our enthusiasm for “Empire Day”. I forget when exactly it falls, but I know that the school children wave banners, and I think that they are rewarded with buns. Cart-horses are decked with rosettes of red, white and blue. Turgid harangues are delivered by patriotic orators, and frequent reference is made to an Empire on which the sun never sets. Jingoism in a surplice, and not seldom in lawn sleeves, gives its benison to the observance, and there is a great effusion of that particular type of ecclesiastical pomposity which on a former occasion we have not scrupled to describe as “Gas and Gaiters.”

Horror of horrors! There is a Jesuit in the Privy Council! Evidently he wants “to get rid of the Empire in some way or other!” Emotion chokes my utterance, so I must conclude as yours etc.

M. J. O’Reilly, C.M.  
Bathurst, May 25th, 1911 (sic)<sup>39</sup>

O’Reilly’s polemics were not restricted to the Bathurst press and to the Bathurst Establishment. He likened the angry outbursts of the Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* to those of King Henry II who wished to be “rid of this turbulent priest” – a reference to Thomas Beckett, the

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<sup>39</sup>*Bathurst Times*, (26 May 1911): 2. The Editor appended a rejoinder. “This letter was handed to us last night at a late hour. It was typewritten and unsigned. We telephoned to the Very Reverend Father O’Reilly to confirm the authenticity of the letter and received a confirmatory reply. So we publish the letter. “Jesuitical Papists” is an expression not used in the matter in question up to now. Why the Very Reverend Father O’Reilly introduces it is more than we can understand. Why the letter was written at all is a puzzle to us. It will have one very excellent effect—it will make people think.”

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Archbishop of Canterbury, whom Henry had had assassinated in 1170. He remonstrated with the Editor for his argument about “proper authority”, asking him what Parliamentary sanction had been given to the celebration of Empire Day in the heart of the Empire, remarking that the English Prime Minister refused to give official sanction, and asking pointedly “who is Lord Meath anyhow?” He objected to the Press’ own bombastic pretension that its views constituted civil authority:

You speak of the audacity of a Churchman daring “to flout civil authority”. These are big words, but what do they mean? What civil authority (outside the very uncivil press) has been flouted? What law has been violated? And is a prosecution to follow?

The truth is that “bombast” is not an ecclesiastical monopoly; all danger of the establishment of a “corner” in that commodity has been dissipated by the enterprise of the press.”<sup>40</sup>

O’Reilly’s conviction that much of the fanfare associated with Empire Day was a creation of the Press finds expression in his reply to the leading article which had appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* on 23 May 1911. This was the article that had been so positioned in the paper as to ensure that it was read before O’Reilly’s views were given space. To have been treated thus – given a sub-leader – galled O’Reilly and he asked if the Editor would do likewise to others, even to a Privy Councillor, the Right Honourable G. W. E. Russell, whose views on Empire Day did not accord with the *Telegraph’s* policy.

In his reply O’Reilly, in six points, refuted the Editor’s claims that he condemned the Empire, was disloyal and that the celebration of

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<sup>40</sup>M. J. O’Reilly CM, Letter to the Editor 23 May 1911, *Sydney Morning Herald*, (26 May 1911): 10.

Empire Day was universally accepted, save by Catholics in Australia. In the seventh point he vigorously replied to the anti-Irish statements made, and to the inference that all Australians were loyal to the Empire, except for the Irish-Australians. He acidly pointed out that were Australian patriots aplenty who did not hesitate to oppose Imperial policy.

7. But when you speak of Australia's loyalty to the Empire, you betray the want of saving humor. Was it Irishmen who taxed British goods coming into Australia? Redmond in his book ("Through the New Commonwealth") quotes the "Daily Telegraph" as saying:— "The Australian States are not prepared to give a single fiscal advantage which they now possess over British competitors in the Commonwealth markets." Was it Irishmen who excluded, and still exclude from Australia, our fellow-subjects of the Empire from India?

Was it an Irishman and Catholic who made the following spech (sic) on Chinese exclusion in the New South Wales Parliament, amidst the enthusiastic cheers of the House? — "Neither for her Majesty's ships of war, nor for her Majesty's representative on the spot, nor for the Secretary of State for the Colonies, do we intend to turn aside from our purpose, which is to terminate the landing of Chinese on these shores for ever, except under the restrictions imposed by the bill."

Will it be believed that that treasonable speech was uttered by Sir Henry Parkes? Is it any wonder that we discount that flag-flapping that stands for cheap patriotism, but which when sacrifices are expected, treats England like a stepmother?

No. Australians have been too long taught to put Australia last, with the result that they are sadly lacking in

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that love of their own land and people, which is the only solid basis on which to rest devotion to the Empire.<sup>41</sup>

The ailing Cardinal Moran kept his distance from all the pyrotechnics – actual and verbal – during this time. Apart from an interview given to the *Daily Telegraph* on 23 May he took no further part in the debate. In the interview Moran made abundantly clear the position that the Catholic Church intended to adopt. Catholic schools intended to celebrate “Australia Day” and maintained that

“Empire Day ...is a purely discredited movement in England. It was inaugurated by the extreme Tory party, and was at first known as Primrose Day, and it is a fact that the party which organised this political movement has been in opposition to every matter of progress introduced into the British Parliament. Hence I say it is discredited by the leaders of the Liberal Party. Here in Australia we are supposed to have a liberal party to guide us along the paths of progress, and if we abandon the paths of progress Australia will very soon enter upon the stage of its decay.

... As real patriots we must attend to the things that are in our midst, and help develop Australia, for by developing Australia we are really preparing for a new phase of splendor for the Empire, which will surpass even its former greatness. I mean to say that Australia must become the key to the Pacific Ocean, as the future of the world will depend very much on the success of Australia in maintaining its prestige as the holder of key of the Pacific.

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<sup>41</sup> M. J. O'Reilly CM, Letter to the Editor 23 May 1911, *Daily Telegraph*, (25 May 1911): 3.

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Now regarding the schools' entertainment and the allegations of disloyalty, it would be well if the hymn which the children are to sing to-day were published in order that it might bear out what I have said with regard to our interest in the progress of this fair land.<sup>42</sup>

The hymn which he released to the *Daily Telegraph*, and which they printed, was O'Reilly's National Hymn. The Cardinal went on to refute the claims being made of Catholic disloyalty by producing a letter that the Catholic Bishops had sent to the King for his Coronation – a letter pledging their “loving homage and devoted loyalty” and their “fervent prayer that many years of prosperity and peace, with every other blessing that Heaven can bestow, may mark a glorious reign ...”

Despite Moran's protestations of loyalty to the British Crown, on Empire Day only the Australian and Irish flags were hoisted at St Mary's Cathedral – the Union Jack was conspicuously absent. Under the headlines “Australia Day” – “Address by Cardinal Moran” – No Union Jack Flown” the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

Australia Day was celebrated by the Roman Catholic section of the community for the first time yesterday. In honour of the occasion the Irish flag and the Australian Ensign were flown from the central tower of St Mary's Cathedral. The Union Jack was not masted. The classroom was decorated with miniature Commonwealth flags.<sup>43</sup>

The Catholic campaign in favour of Australia Day appears to have been carefully thought out and crafted – the Cardinal presented the official line and presided over the celebrations in St Mary's Cathedral on 24 May 1911. O'Reilly did the fighting.

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<sup>42</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, (24 May 1911): 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, (25 May 1911): 10.

## **Conclusion**

When O'Reilly penned, in 1900, his poem "Australia", he opened it with the words: "Australia! We have heard thy voice above each wretched brawl." Little was he to know that he would himself be party to a brawl in order to make the voice of Australia heard over that of the Empire. He fought for and earnestly promoted Australian patriotism. He was a man quick to defend his convictions even to the extent of causing a near riot while addressing a demonstration against the deportation of the German priest, Fr Jerger,<sup>44</sup>

Was he a rebel? He himself thought so. Speaking at Granville in 1922 against the support given by the New South Wales Government to the Loyal Orange Institute of New South Wales, he opened his address with these words: "I was never a disloyalist. I was always a rebel, and I am glad to come back a perfectly impenitent rebel."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> At one stage, O'Reilly, arming himself with a chair, invited those who wished to lay hands on him and to hoist the Union Jack on the platform where he was speaking, "to come on." O'Reilly had angered them by his uncomplimentary remarks about the Union Jack. Cf. Wilkinson, "Father Maurice O'Reilly: A Controversial Priest", 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Documents in Australian Catholic History*, Volume II, 334. See also: M. L'Estrange, *Rebellion without Disloyalty: Reverend Father Maurice J. O'Reilly, C.M. and the Conscription Referenda, 1916-1917* (B.A. Hons Thesis, University of Sydney, 1974).