

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT  
OF  
AUSTRALASIA.

SIR HENRY PARKES.

Grand Banquet at Melbourne

*"Crimson Thread  
speech"*

6 February 1890



## GRAND BANQUET AT MELBOURNE.

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ON the 6th February, 1890, on the occasion of the assembling of the Federation Conference in Melbourne, Mr. Gillies, the Prime Minister, gave a great banquet in the Queen's Hall, Parliament House, at which it was estimated four hundred guests were present, including His Excellency the Earl of Hopetoun, and nearly every representative man in Victoria. The only toast, "A United Australasia," was proposed by the Hon. James Service, to which it was arranged that Sir Henry Parkes should respond.

Sir HENRY PARKES, on rising, was received with loud and long-continued cheering, many of those present standing up and waving their handkerchiefs. He said:—Mr. Gillies, my Lord, and Gentlemen,—I feel in a peculiar manner the honour of being asked to respond to this toast. Your Prime Minister can tell you it certainly was not of my seeking. I raised such reasonable objections as occurred to me against taking this prominent part in our gathering to-night; but on his representations I consented to take the responsibility of responding to the toast, which has been proposed in a speech so conciliatory, so forcible, in certain respects so telling, and in all respects so worthy of the hon. gentleman who submitted it for your acceptance. (Cheers.) Mr. Service is a citizen of whom any country in the world might be proud. (Hear, hear.) He has on many occasions, under remarkably trying circumstances, displayed that robustness of character, that clear foresight



and decision, which distinguish a brave citizen. On all occasions, so far as my knowledge enables me to form an opinion, he has been a worthy citizen of this great colony of Victoria. His speech is one against which no complaint can be fairly raised. He has made it under circumstances which might have awakened in some minds an acerbity of feeling, but he has displayed none. (Cheers.) It has been made under circumstances which might in some men have produced irritation and induced them to show uncharitableness. But none has been shown. On the whole the speech was worthy of him—worthy of the country and worthy of our cause. (Cheers.) But, sir, there was one feature in his speech which, under suggestions of friends near me, seems to be capable of humorous treatment. He has told you that certain gentlemen provided water, and the horses would not come to drink. (Laughter.) It was suggested by friends near me that unanimity might have been secured if something such as Sir James MacBain might have supplied—(laughter)—if that had been added to the water all of them would have come to drink. (Laughter.) Be that as it may, we are all here to-night—(cheers)—not only to drink of this water of national life, but to do the most we can—and I can answer for the great colony I represent—at some sacrifice to bring about the grand event which is foreshadowed in this gathering. (Loud cheers.)

In this human world of ours, so full of wise designs, mixed with so much failure and error, nothing is more noticeable than the delusions which lead men on to great crises. On the eve of that terrible convulsion which shattered France to atoms and startled the world, the ruling people and fashionable life went on as ever. There

was marrying and giving in marriage, there were merry-makings and festivals, until the hidden elements burst out from under them and around them, and all the world wondered. No one supposed that they were standing on the brink of a terrible precipice. Without going to such examples as that, many and many is the occasion where men go on with their eyes closed, when only the few far-seeing students of philosophy and history can see. And it may be at this moment that the people of these Australian colonies are going on with their bartering, rejoicing, and merrymaking—of which we know they are so fond—without being aware that they are standing on the imminence of an event that can only occur once in the whole world's history—the creation of a nation. (Cheers.) The creation of a nation is an event which never can recur. There cannot be two birthdays of national existence. And in this country of Australia, with such ample space, with such inviting varieties of soil and climate, with such vast stores in the hidden wealth under the soil, with such unrivalled richness on all hands, and with a people occupying that soil unequalled in all the whole range of the human race, in nation-creating properties, what is there that should be impossible to those people? By the closest calculation that I have been able to make, we, including New Zealand, want two hundred thousand souls to make four millions of a population. If four millions of a population cannot be a basis for national life, then there never will be a national life. (Cheers.) Four millions of population, all of British origin, many and many thousands united to the soil by ties of birth, by ties of parentage, by ties of friendship and love, as well as by ties of marriage and ties of children,



if they are not capable of making a nation—a united Australasia, why we are not fit hardly to occupy this bounteous country. (Applause.)

But if anyone supposes those are mere flights of imagination, let us come down to the barest possible calculation of facts. A hundred years ago the continent was occupied by a despairing group of outcast persons of British origin, and that British origin speaks volumes in every step of our calculation. Forty years ago the colony of Victoria had no existence. I had been an inhabitant of Australia ten years before Victoria was born; I was an inhabitant of Australia, and had a seat in a Legislature before the colony of Queensland was born. There is, however, no man in Victoria or Queensland who more rejoiced in their birth and in their prosperous career, and in the grand results that followed, than I did. (Cheers.) Those two colonies, the great and splendid Victoria on our south, with Queensland hardly less splendid, if at all less splendid, on our north, are truly daughters of New South Wales. (Cheers.) Those colonies sprung as it were from our loins. But there is a difference between us and Adam; for they took a rib from each side of us. (Laughter.) However, we rejoice in the fortunes of those colonies, and if my friend, Mr. Gillies, or our friend, Sir Samuel Griffith, doubts that we take a pride and feel a becoming glory in the advance of Victoria and Queensland, let me tell them they are greatly mistaken. (Loud cheers.) The mother colony knows too well—of course I don't include some two or three carpers, whatever they do or say just now—New South Wales knows too well that the prosperity of her two daughters means her own. (Cheers.) We know that it is

a wise dispensation that these large colonies sprang into existence, and we admired them when they were fighting their own battles and working out their own prosperity independently of New South Wales, but the time has now arrived when we are no longer isolated. (Cheers.) **The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all.** Even the native-born Australians are Britons, as much as the men born within the cities of London and Glasgow. We know the value of their British origin. We know that we represent a race—but time, of course, does not permit me to glance even at its composition—but we know we represent a race for the purposes of settling new colonies, which never had its equal on the face of the earth. (Loud cheers.) We know, too, that conquering wild territory, and planting civilised communities therein, is a far nobler, a far more immortalising achievement than conquest by feats of arms. We as separate communities have had to fight our way. We have had that which at times, I dare say, has degenerated into antagonism, naturally enough; but on the whole I do not believe that the thoughtful men of Victoria have ever lost sight of the good qualities of the men of New South Wales. (Cheers.) I do not believe that the people of the mother colony—and we have many men and women in the second and third generation born on the soil—have ever lost their admiration of the legitimate enterprise and fine emulation of the people of Victoria. What may be said of Victoria may be said of Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, and may be said of our sister, New Zealand, if she will condescend to permit us to call her sister. Is there a man living in any part of Australasia who will say that it would be to the advantage of the whole



that we should remain disunited—"No, no," and cheers.)—with our animosities, border Customs, and all the friction which our border Customs tend to produce, until the end of time. (Cheers.) I do not believe there is a sane man in the whole population of Australasia who will say such a daringly absurd thing. (Cheers.) If this is admitted, the question is reduced to very narrow limits, and it follows that, at some time or other, we must unite as one great Australian people. (Cheers.)

Let those who are opposed to the union now point out the advantage that would arise from one, five, or ten years' delay. It is impossible for the human intellect to conceive that any advantage could arise. Do we not all see that the difficulties would be greater as years go on. If that reasoning is correct, we have now arrived at a time when we are fully justified by all the laws that regulate the growth of free communities in uniting under one Government and one flag. (Cheers.) The flag of United Australasia means to me no separation from the empire. (Prolonged cheering.) It means to me no attempt to create a foreign political organisation. Admitting, as I do, that the interests of the Australian people ought to be the first object of concern, still I say that our interests cannot be promoted by any rash, thoughtless, and crude separation from the grand old country of which we are all so proud. (Cheers.) All free communities must have a political head, and I should like to ask any thoughtful student of history what supreme head we could have more attractive, more ennobling, more consonant with the true principles of liberty than our august Sovereign, who, during her beneficent reign, has seen more improvements for the

amelioration of the human race than ever any sovereign saw before in the history of the world. There is no reign of emperor, king, or potentate, which has included such tremendous changes for the improvement of the world, for the spread of Christian civilization, and for increasing the happiness of the mass of the human family as that of Queen Victoria. (Cheers.) Let it not go forth for a moment—and I think I may speak for my colleagues in the conference—that in seeking complete authority over our own affairs in this fair land of Australia we are seeking any separation from the great empire. (Cheers.)

Now what stands in the way of a federated Australasia?—A common tariff. National life is a broad river of living water. Your fiscal notions—and I am a freetrader remember—(hear, hear)—your fiscal notions on one side or the other, are as planting a few stones or piling up a sandbank to divert the stream for a little, in order to serve some local interest. This question of a common tariff is a mere trifle compared with the great overshadowing question of a living and eternal national existence. Free trade or protection, all must admit, is to a large extent but a device for carrying out a human notion; but there is no human notion at all about the eternal life of a free nation. I say then that what I understand by the sentiment of a united Australasia is a sinking of all subordinate questions. I speak for my colony, which is as great as the rest of you. (Cheers.) We are prepared, and I will answer for the Parliament and the people of the country I represent, to go into this national union without making any bargain whatever—(cheers)—without stipulating for any advantage whatever for ourselves, but trusting to the good faith and justice of a Federal



Parliament. (Cheers.) We are praying that God will give us power to rise above these secondary considerations, and that we may be able to come to an agreement to create this united Australia which you are as much in favour of as I am. These smaller questions ought not to be considered at the present time, and they ought not to deter us from reaching the great consummation which we have in view. (Hear, hear.)

Although I had no wish to speak to-night of the conference, I may say that my colleague and myself have come to Melbourne with no preconceived notion, with no binding instruction, but to enter into unreserved consultation with the delegates from the rest of the colonies. Gentlemen, that is all that I shall say on this subject. If the gentlemen representing the other colonies rise to the dignity of the question which challenges our attention there can be no doubt as to the result. (Hear, hear.) But after all, my lord and gentlemen, the determination of this question rests with the populations of the colonies—(hear, hear)—and whatever may be done by Cabinets or conferences, depend upon it, the question having been opened will be expanded wider and wider. Light has been thrown upon it, volumes of new light will be cast upon it as days roll on, and believing, as I firmly do, that the people of this country have already made up their minds to be united, I consider that no hand on the face of the earth is strong enough to keep them asunder. (Cheers.) But supposing there should be a United Australia, what would be the benefit to us? Well, with the one leap we should appear before the world as a nation. (Hear, hear.) As separate colonies we are of little consequence, but the potentate does not exist—the

ruling authority in human affairs does not exist—who would lightly consider the decision of a United Australasia. (Cheers.) We should grow at once—in a day, as it were—from a group of disunited communities into one solid, powerful, rich, and widely-respected power. (Cheers.) Believing, then, as I do, that every man in these colonies would be the better off by this union, and that no injury could result to any honest interest in consequence, I am altogether in favour of no time being lost in carrying out the sublime object. (Cheers.) Time would not permit, and I do not think that it would be very appropriate if time did, to refer to examples, but if we look to what other states have done we should find that all the examples were in our favour. We are here a great people united by natural ties, and with all the capacities that civilised communities can possess. We are as capable of managing our own affairs as our countrymen in any other part of the Empire. We are in a fruitful land, separated by the will of Providence from the rest of the world. (Hear, hear.) What has been difficult in other parts of the world ought not to be difficult with us, and the only obstacles that stand in the way of a united Australasia are those which arise from our unfortunate separation. Every conceivable difficulty is based upon the separation which we all deplore. Well, these are difficulties which it is to the benefit of all to get rid of. Remember, gentlemen, that no work worthy of achievement was ever attained without surmounting difficulties. Supposing ours were tenfold greater than they are, they ought not to turn us from our object, for it is sound and good. But seeing that they are similar to those difficulties which occur amongst any other large body of men, seeing that



they are not difficulties at all if once looked steadily in the face, why should we delay in bringing about that union, which thoughtful men, not only here but in other parts of the world, who take an interest in the progress of the British race, believe will redound to our lasting and eternal good. (Cheers.) I do not think there can be any doubt of the interest which our countrymen in the motherland take in the movement. I do not know, but I venture to say that our proceedings here to-day will form the keenest topic of attention to the London press. I do know, from sources of information in my possession, that our countrymen in the United States are looking at this movement with the keenest interest. If, then, thoughtful men in the motherland, and thoughtful men in that great offshoot of which we are still proud, and thoughtful men in these colonies are interested in this question, can we have a better guarantee that we are right. (Cheers.) It cannot be shown that at some other period we shall be in a better position to bring about a united Australasia. (Cheers.) Gentlemen, I have tried to express my individual sentiments on this question. I shall endeavour, in friendly agreement with my colleagues, to do my best towards the same end. I wish to make it known to the world that, so long as I have power, I shall not cease to strive to bring about this glorious consummation. (Cheers.) I thank you, gentlemen, for the manner in which you have received this toast, I thank Mr. Service for the wise, discriminating, and gratifying remarks which he made in submitting it. I do hope that this meeting to-night—this great representative meeting which does you, Mr. Gillies, so much honour—reflects the sentiments of the great colony of Victoria, and

that the time is coming when we shall all appear before the world as a United Australia. (Loud and prolonged cheers.)