Twitter Thread by David Fickling



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We all know about how "Advance Australia Fair" was first performed in the middle of a outbreak of race riots, right?

Alarming Raid on Chinese.

A TUMULTUOUS scene, by which life and property were endangered, occurred in various parts of the city last night, the victims of the disgraceful outburst being the Chinese. At the anti-Chinese meeting in Hyde Park there was a tremendous gathering of larrikins of all ages, who appeared from the start bent on mischief. This inclination was probably further impelled by the forcible language given utterance to by one or two of the speakers relative to Mongolian immorality and degradation. Be that as it may, before the demonstration terminated a mob of upwards of two thousand young ruffians, ranging from fourteen to twenty years of age, collected and started off in the direction of Park-street. Several policemen followed, but as nothing serious transpired their services were not called into action. After the larrikins had found that their movements were known to the police, a part of their number stealthily broke away from the main body, and at full speed made their way to lower George-street to the principal Chinese residences in this city, signalising their approach by blazing torches, with which, as was soon demonstrated, they deliberately intended to burn down the Chinese cabinet workshops in that locality. Fortunately the police authorities, fearing a disturbance, had stationed a number of constables in plain clothes about the places. On the arrival of the excited rabble, notwithstanding the recognised presence of the police, many of the larrikins found their way to the back of Ah Toy's extensive workshop, and deliberately attempted to set the place ablaze with torches. Seeing the utter uselessness of trying to arrest any of the ringleaders from such a throng, the constables with excellent judgment, drew their batons, coming down with great force on many of their devoted heads and shoulders, and with telling effect. But though they were repulsed, nothing could be done to check their awful defiant hooting and threats, which, judging from the movement of lights within the buildings, had the effect of making John Chinaman believe his time had come to go. But, eventually, the mob retreated, and up George-street they swept, with the old Lambing Flat cry, "Roll up! no Chinese!" resounding in all parts of the thoroughfare. Eventually the mob met two unof-

As @LukeLPearson points out here, the cosmetic change of one word is pretty pathetic.

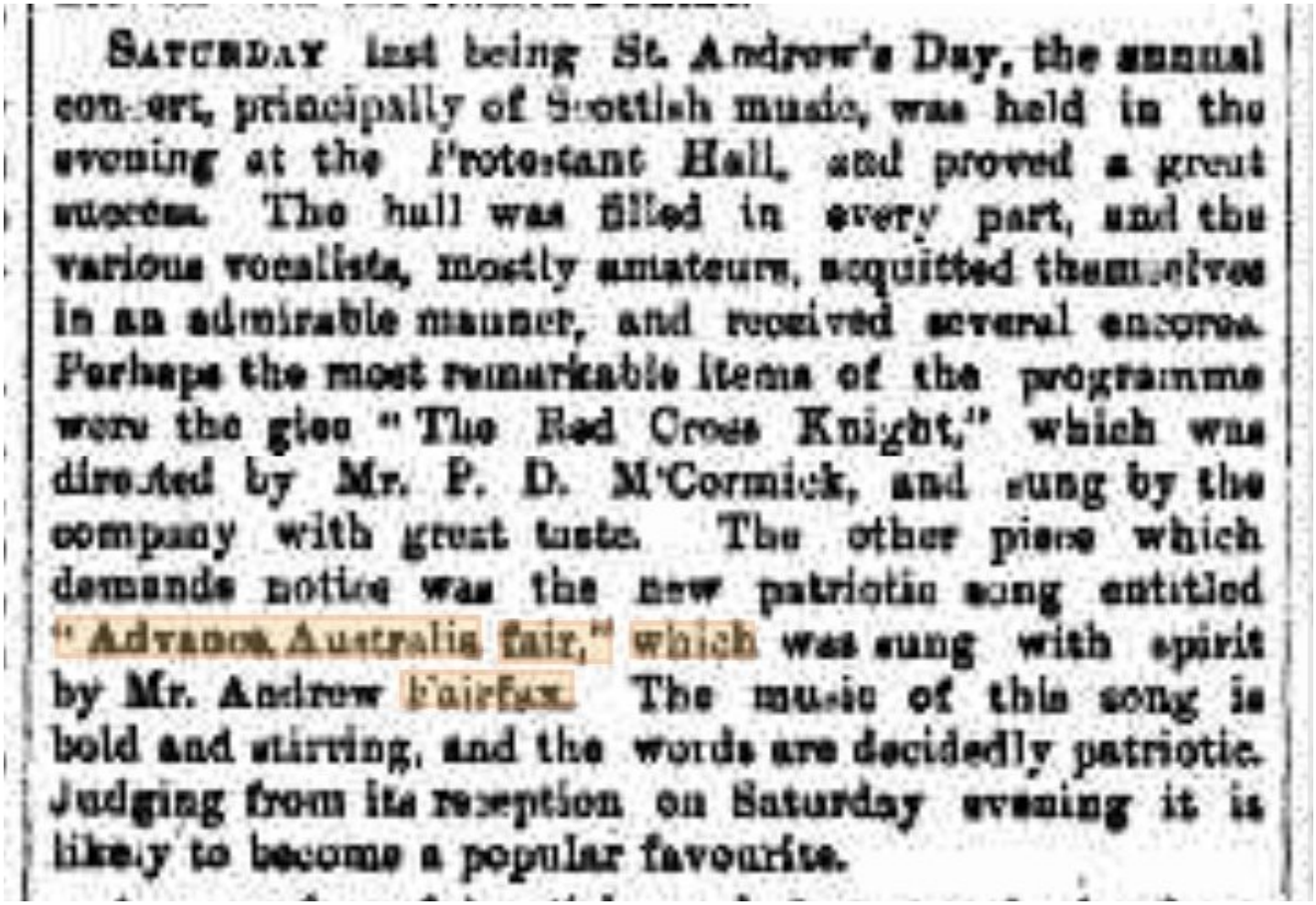
But we've genuinely forgotten the context in which the song was written: an outbreak of anti-Chinese violence in 1870s Sydney, which ultimately led to Federation.

https://t.co/9eIsmEqRl1

> I wrote something (ostensibly) about the change to Australia's national anthem, swapping 'young' for 'one'.
>
> We are One Nation?https://t.co/DynoAlXVxQ
>
> — IndigenousX Team - Luke (@IndigenousX) December 31, 2020

Here's the Sydney Morning Herald's account of its first performance on St. Andrews Day, 30 November 1878:

https://t.co/6DunDKIbvB



SATURDAY last being St. Andrew's Day, the annual concert, principally of Scottish music, was held in the evening at the Protestant Hall, and proved a great success. The hall was filled in every part, and the various vocalists, mostly amateurs, acquitted themselves in an admirable manner, and received several encores. Perhaps the most remarkable items of the programme were the glee "The Red Cross Knight," which was directed by Mr. P. D. M'Cormick, and sung by the company with great taste. The other piece which demands notice was the new patriotic song entitled "Advance Australia fair," which was sung with spirit by Mr. Andrew Fairfax. The music of this song is bold and stirring, and the words are decidedly patriotic. Judging from its reception on Saturday evening it is likely to become a popular favourite.

On the adjoining column is an account of an incident the same week when two well-dressed men in black coats and white shirt-fronts brutally attacked a Chinese man in Essex Street in the Rocks with a hammer:

A more brutal and cowardly assault upon an unoffending Chinaman was perpetrated on Tuesday night, in Essex-street, by two of the larrikin confraternity, both of whom unfortunately effected their escape before the police could arrive on the scene. The victim of the assault was a celestial named Ah Gee, employed as servant to one of the officers on board the E. and A. Co.'s steamer City of Brisbane, from whom he receives an excellent character as regards conduct and efficiency in the performance of his duties. The particulars of the assault, as far as can be gathered from the statement of Ah Gee, and that of a seaman named Callaghan, who witnessed the latter part of the occurrence and the subsequent flight of the assailants show that the assault was altogether unprovoked and of a most determined nature, the instrument used being a heavy hammer, with which the Chinaman was struck heavily several times over the head and face, causing very severe injuries. The ruffianly assailants, both of whom Callaghan describes as being well dressed in black cloth coats and white shirt fronts, only desisted from the assault when Callaghan drove up. The Chinaman was then in an insensible condition and was bleeding from two wounds on the head and one on the face. The hammer which inflicted the injuries was picked up by Callaghan and handed over to the police, after he had driven Ah Gee to the Infirmary. We learn that four other Chinamen were also assaulted last night in the vicinity of Smith's wharf, but none of them so severely as Ah Gee. In order to prevent the repetition of similar occurrences four constables in plain clothes have been told off especially for the protection of the Chinese in and about Lower George-street.

This wasn't an isolated incident. In fact, racist anti-Chinese agitation in November 1878 in Sydney was a crucial turning point in Australia's Federation as a unified country.

There had been periodic race riots against Chinese miners on the goldfields of Victoria and Queensland since the 1850s but the 1878 Seamen's Strike was the first time this came to urban Australia.

The Seamen's Union started agitating against the Australasian Steam Navigation Company in July 1878 about its hiring of Chinese labourers as ship crew. By November it had turned into a mass strike.

There was very serious unrest. After a meeting in Hyde Park on 4 December a few days after "Advance Australia Fair" debuted, a mob of 2,000 people carrying torches attempted to burn down a Chinese-owned business and attacked people in the street:

https://t.co/Y8Ktav0ZmD

As the *Telegraph*, last week, published about a column of sensational items from Sydney referring to riots with the Chinese, the *Courier* sent a special telegram to the *S. M. Herald* office enquiring as to the truth of the statements. The following is the answer received on Friday night by telegram:—"Facts absurdly exaggerated. On Wednesday, after anti-Chinese meeting in Hyde Park, a mob of about 600 larrikins left the park about 9 o'clock, and went to a Chinese residence in Park-street, and stoned the house. One of the offenders was arrested by the police. While the mob was there a Chinaman came to the door of the house and knocked for admission, and it was only by his seeking refuge in a public-house that he escaped from the mob, who made a dash at him immediately they saw him. Several Chinamen, we are informed, were maltreated in George-street. Measures had been taken by police authorities to prevent any serious disorder, and constables in private clothes were stationed in various quarters of the city where Chinamen live. A mob of about 2000 larrikins, of ages ranging from 17 to 19, marched with torches down to lower George-street and Queen's-place, and going to Ah Toy's cabinet factory, thrust a lighted torch through a back window. A constable near at hand seized the torch in time to prevent mischief. This was the only serious attempt at destruction of property, and the Government offer £50 reward for the arrest of the perpetrator. Several Chinamen have since been ill-treated by young larrikins, but the police quickly dispersed the boys, and no excitement exists in the city. The seamen have had nothing to do with these demonstrations."

The agitation spread like wildfire.

The Sydney Evening News edition reporting another early performance of "Advance Australia Fair" in early December 1878 records anti-Chinese meetings in Bathurst, Mudgee, Goulburn, Wellington and Brisbane:

https://t.co/kOsHmp4nAH

The Anti-Chinese Movement at Bathurst.

BATHURST, Wednesday.—Another meeting was held to-night, at the School of Arts, in reference to the strike, and was largely attended. Messrs. William Collins and Joseph Wright, delegates from the Seamen's Union, were present, and gave a statement of what occurred between the A.S.N. Company and the seamen. The first and principal resolution, moved by Mr. John Boyd, and seconded by Mr. James Kellaher, was passed, stating that the action taken by the seamen was the only decisive step they could have taken, and expressing the sympathy of the meeting and giving a pledge to assist the seamen by every legitimate means to bring the present struggle to a satisfactory issue. Several persons addressed the meeting, and subscription lists were opened and a committee appointed to manage local affairs. The meeting was orderly and well conducted.

The Chinese Question at Mudgee.

MUDGEE, Thursday.—A large number of persons assembled in the balcony of the Royal Hotel, last night, to discuss the Chinese question. Mr. Wilton, Mayor of Gulgong, occupied the chair. After some discussion it was agreed, owing to a heavy thunderstorm, and consequent unavoidable absence of some of the requisitionists, to postpone the meeting until Wednesday next. Several of those present were in favour of taking strong steps against the A.S.N. Company for their action in employing Chinese labour.

News from Goulburn.

GOULBURN, Thursday.—Pastor Chiniquy's lectures during the week, at the Mechanics' Institute, have been largely attended, and have passed off quietly.——Mr. Dennis, late postmaster at Braidwood, and at present stationed in Wagga, has accepted an appointment as record clerk in the Sydney office.——Bright flashes of lightning, last evening, accompanied by sharp thunderclaps, preceded a heavy downpour of rain during the night, the register showing that three-quarters of an inch had fallen. This morning it is pleasantly cool.

Anti-Chinese Meeting at Goulburn.

GOULBURN, Thursday.—An anti-Chinese demonstration has been arranged to come off this evening, to be followed by a torchlight procession. The members of the committee appointed have all things in readiness for an imposing display.

Anti-Chinese Meeting at Wellington.

WELLINGTON, Thursday.—A monster public anti-Chinese meeting is to be held here to-night. Resolutions of sympathy with the men on strike in Sydney are to be proposed, and pecuniary assistance is to be given to them.——There was a splendid thunderstorm here last night. It rained heavily for three hours, and the lightning was very vivid.

The Seamen's Strike was arguably the start of the union movement in Australia. It also led to 1881 legislation restricting Chinese migration into New South Wales.

The reluctance of most states to pass such legislation in line with NSW and Victoria was one of the driving forces behind Federation.

Read the original four-verse text of the song – with its lines about "English soil and fatherland" and promises to "rouse to arms" against "foreign foe" — and consider the race riots that were playing out in the same city when it was first performed.

https://t.co/jH9k2jqEm3

"ADVANCE, AUSTRALIA FAIR."

PATRIOTIC SONG.

By "AMICUS."

AUSTRALIA'S sons, let us rejoice,
For we are young and free;
We've golden soil and wealth for toil,
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature's gifts,
Of beauty rich and rare.
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia fair.
In joyful strains let us sing,
Advance, Australia fair.

When gallant Cook from Albion sail'd,
To trace wide ocean's o'er;
True British courage bore him on,
Till he landed on our shore;
Then here he raised Old England's flag,
The standard of the brave;
"With all her faults we love her still,"
"Britannia rules the wave."
In joyful strains, etc.

While other nations of the globe
Behold us from afar,
We'll rise to high renown and shine
Like our glorious southern star;
From English soil and Fatherland,
Scotia and Erin fair,
Let all combine with heart and hand
To advance Australia fair.
In joyful strains, etc.

Should foreign foe e'er sight our coast,
Or dare a foot to land,
We'll rouse to arms, like sires of old,
To guard our native strand;
Britannia then shall surely know,
Though oceans roll between;
Her sons in fair Australia's land
Still keep their courage green.
In joyful strains, etc.

There aren't many good national anthems IMO, but that history does leave a particularly bad taste in my mouth, regardless of how much the lyrics are cleaned up.