

# Stanley Melbourne Bruce

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*Australian Internationalist*

David Lee



STANLEY MELBOURNE BRUCE



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## *Introduction*

To Australians who know anything of him, Stanley Melbourne Bruce, prime minister from 1923 to 1929, was an Anglophile reactionary and wearer of spats, and one of only two federal leaders to have suffered the misfortune to lose his seat in parliament at a general election. None of the three biographies of Bruce so far published has succeeded in adequately correcting this caricature or fully recognizing his innovatory significance. The first was published in 1965 by Australian journalist Cecil Edwards, who had reported on Bruce in the 1920s and then obtained access to his personal papers after Bruce retired from public life. This biography, *Bruce of Melbourne: Man of Two Worlds*, was replete with long excerpts from his subject's correspondence and from taped recordings, and was produced during a time of growing nationalism and an emerging sense of Australia's separateness from Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> This was only a few years before Australian Prime Minister John Gorton informed British diplomats, in the wake of Britain's announced strategic withdrawal from Australia's region and its impending entry into the European Economic Community, that Australia would regard Britain from then on as simply another 'foreign' country.<sup>2</sup>

This climate of opinion shaped Edwards's approach. He considered that Bruce, who had lived more of his life in Britain than in the land of his birth, straddled two distinct worlds, one Australian and the other British. In 1974 the diplomat Alfred Stirling published reminiscences of Bruce during the latter's term of office as Australian high commissioner in London.<sup>3</sup> Stirling always hoped that his memoir and Edwards's biography would together form the basis of a more substantial life of Bruce which would make use of sources that were unavailable to them at the time. I. M. Cumpston, an Australian historian then working at London University, attempted such a biography in 1989, but this work, while adding to the previous two biographies, failed to explain the man and his motivations.<sup>4</sup> All three memoirs present a rich panoply of personal and political incident, primarily within an anecdotal framework.

In the broader scholarly literature, some historians have presented Bruce in the way he was viewed in the 1940s by Australia's Minister for External Affairs, H. V. Evatt: as a politician who put British imperial interests before Australian interests, for example, by his uncritical reliance on the Singapore naval defence strategy in the Second World War and his role in denuding Australian air

defences by supporting the Empire Air Training Scheme at the cost of Australia's pitifully inadequate defences. The opposite case has been persuasively presented by Kosmas Tsokhas, who has argued against what he calls this 'imperial fallacy'.<sup>5</sup> Tsokhas contends that Bruce, along with other interwar Australian prime ministers, W. M. Hughes, J. A. Lyons and R. G. Menzies, should be seen not as Anglophiles and imperialists but rather as Australian nationalists who drove hard and advantageous bargains for their country in commercial and political negotiations with successive British governments. Others such as A. T. Ross have also attempted to rehabilitate Australia's interwar governments, including Bruce's, by arguing that they successfully laid the basis for a self-reliant defence posture and a substantial home-grown capacity to manufacture armaments in the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

In the modern age of globalization, this biography takes issue with the picture in Edwards's representation of Bruce as inhabiting 'two worlds' and suggests that Bruce understood them as one world. Throughout his career, Bruce sought to harmonize Australian nationalism, British imperialism and internationalism. Bruce, though a staunch supporter of empire, was also an Australian nationalist insofar as he was determined to strengthen, unify and better direct the Commonwealth of Australia in its relations with other countries. While his compatriots may have viewed him as 'British', in the United Kingdom he was often regarded as assertively Australian. He supported the empire, which he saw as an association of the United Kingdom and its dependent colonies and other self-governing British communities, linked by a common adherence to the Crown in a vast free-trading economy and committed to constitutionalism, the rule of law, and responsible self-government for those ready to exercise it. One of the central objectives of his career, especially as a diplomat, was to harmonize his Australian nationalism with his support for a British World in which Australia would be an integral component. His nationalism and imperialism could not always be reconciled. For example, he was committed philosophically to the empire acting with one voice in foreign affairs, but often irritated when the United Kingdom acted without proper consultation with the self-governing Dominions.

Also central to Bruce's project to make the British World a stronger and more integrated whole was an internationalism that slowly but surely emerged from the 1920s onwards. A powerful influence in his formative years had been his role in an Anglo-Australian trading business where he saw at first hand the benefits of commerce and other networks that were increasingly drawing the nations of the British Empire and the world closer together in what is now seen as the dawning of the first golden age of 'globalization' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>7</sup> Revolted by his experience of war, Bruce became a supporter of the League of Nations; he played an important role in it, and later in the development of international architecture to replace it during and after the Second World War.

Throughout his political and diplomatic career he strove to entrench the idea of peaceful collaboration among nation states to address issues that could not be solved by any one of them alone. Far from being a reactionary, Bruce was a progressive, whose significant contribution to the development of international organization from the 1920s to the 1940s should be more fully appreciated. Stanley Melbourne Bruce, in addition to being a key architect of the Australian nation, was one of its most important internationalists.

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## *Commerce and Conflict, 1883–1917*

In 1917 Captain Stanley Bruce of the 2nd Royal Fusiliers, twice wounded at Gallipoli and decorated for gallantry on the field of battle, returned on crutches to Australia, his country of birth. Since 1902, although making intermittent trips back to Australia, he had been based in England, studying at the University of Cambridge before practising as a commercial barrister and chairing the London board of his family company. The War Office had granted him six months' medical leave from the British regiment, which he had joined after the outbreak of war, and expected him to return to duty when he had recovered from his wounds. What precipitated Stanley Bruce's return to Australia was the decision of his brother Ernest also to enlist in the British Army.<sup>1</sup> Stanley therefore had to return to Australia to take Ernest's place as manager of the Melbourne office of Paterson, Laing and Bruce. This turn of events was to propel Stanley into Australian and international politics.

Stanley Melbourne Bruce was born in Melbourne on 15 April 1883 in the bayside suburb of St Kilda at 71 Grey Street – in a substantial house befitting the social status of his prosperous merchant father. From windows overlooking Port Phillip Bay, its residents would have been able to see ships laden with goods from the mother country sailing in from the Great Southern Ocean.<sup>2</sup> Stanley was born in an era of expanding global networks: submarine telegraph cables were linking Britain's far-flung overseas empire; steamships were making ocean-going travel and trade much cheaper, swifter and safer; and, in parallel with this international process, moves were afoot to unite the previously separate British colonies in Australasia in a political federation.<sup>3</sup> Born into a world of commerce, Stanley was to become committed to preserving the prosperity that Australia had acquired through its membership of this great free-trading empire and of strengthening the new Australian federation which would be established in 1901.

Stanley had four siblings: the eldest, named Mary after her mother, was born in 1873, and his three brothers Ernest, William Crawford and Robert followed in 1874, 1876 and 1878 respectively. Their ancestors had lived in Scotland, in eastern Ayrshire near to Annandale, the patrimony of the great Scottish king Robert the Bruce.<sup>4</sup> When young Stanley's cousins tired of him reciting 'King Bruce of Scotland', his father prophetically interjected, 'Stanley must recite. He's going to be prime minister one day. So he must learn to talk.'<sup>5</sup>

Stanley's father, John Munro Bruce, who had been born in 1840, not in Scotland but in Ireland at Brooklawn in County Leitrim, was one of the hundred thousand or so Scottish Protestants who had settled in Ireland since the seventeenth century. Sent over the sea to school at St Andrews, John Bruce was brought home prematurely in 1853 and apprenticed in the Belfast linen trade to Harry Hopkins and Co.<sup>6</sup> Inheriting the Scottish passion for education and advancement, he and an older brother, William Duff, educated themselves to a significant degree. These two brothers eventually left Ireland, William becoming a civil engineer in India and John a pillar of the Melbourne establishment.<sup>7</sup>

At the end of his apprenticeship, at the age of 18 and with meagre financial resources, John Bruce travelled to the other side of the world, arriving in Melbourne on the *Ellen Stuart* in December 1858. The discovery of gold near Ballarat in 1851, the year when the Port Phillip District separated from New South Wales to become a colony in its own right, had transformed Victoria. Its largely pastoral economy, centred upon the grazing empires of 'squatters', was being rapidly transformed into an industrial economy supported by a community of small yeomen farmers. Gold also enlarged the colony's population, from about 75,000 in 1851 to more than half a million by John Bruce's arrival at which time the entire white Australian population numbered a little over one million. By dint of hard work and a flair for buying and selling, he established himself in the Melbourne business world, becoming a partner in 1868 in an established importing firm which eventually became known as Paterson, Laing and Bruce. The company imported softgoods from the British Isles when Australian manufacturing was in its infancy and demand for British clothes and apparel was so strong that, at the time of Stanley's birth, the business was the owner of the largest warehouse in Victoria.<sup>8</sup>

In 1872, at the age of 32, John Bruce sent to Ireland for his 24-year-old cousin, Mary Ann Henderson, an Irish beauty whom he married at his inner city house in Jolimont terrace.<sup>9</sup> Stanley would inherit Mary Ann's dark hair and 'brooding' eyes.<sup>10</sup> As he became increasingly prosperous in the 1870s and 1880s, John Bruce was able to devote more of his time to civic affairs. His social and political connections were expanded when, having learnt to play golf in St Andrews, Scotland, he brought a set of clubs back to Australia. He helped to introduce the sport to the colonies by becoming one of the founders of the Royal Melbourne Golf Club which was opened by the governor of Victoria, Lord Hopetoun, on 1 July 1891.<sup>11</sup> Stanley followed in his father's footsteps by taking up golf at a young age and becoming a proficient golfer; he would towards the end of his life become the first Australian to captain the Royal and Ancient Club at St Andrews.

In his days of prosperity John Bruce acquired two homes, 'Wombalano', a large colonial-style mansion in Toorak, the riverside suburb of the Melbourne bourgeoisie, and another near Scoresby at Fern Glen, a township in the County of Mornington. Stanley remembered his father, a large bearded man who died

when he was 18, as charming, genial, persuasive and of ‘never failing urbanity’ in the outside world, but aloof and stern with his children.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Stanley later admitted, John Bruce was a remote figure whom he had hardly known at all, perhaps not appreciating how much he had inherited his father’s characteristics. These included an aloof detachment, sometimes perceived as arrogance, tempered by good manners, cleverness and politeness.

Whereas political liberalism in New South Wales was associated with support for free trade, in Victoria it was connected with protection of local industry and other forms of state action. A protectionist liberal, John Bruce played a prominent part in securing support in the 1886 election for the Victorian administration in which Duncan Gillies was premier and Alfred Deakin chief secretary. Deakin was an alumnus of the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School (‘Melbourne Grammar’ – the colony’s most prestigious Anglican school), a pioneer of social reform, a supporter of bold irrigation schemes, and an enthusiast for federation of the Australasian colonies; he was to become the Commonwealth of Australia’s first Attorney-General in 1901 and then prime minister.<sup>13</sup>

Although he and his family were Presbyterian, John Bruce decided to send Stanley to Deakin’s alma mater in 1896. He probably made the decision to send his youngest son there rather than to the Presbyterian Scotch College to give Stanley what appeared to be the best opportunities for advancement in the social, political and business world.<sup>14</sup> Stanley would henceforth identify more with the church of England than with the Scottish church. Though an average student, he was active in cricket, rowing and athletics and captained the school’s Australian Rules football team. In 1901, his final year, he became school captain. His fellow students clearly recognized the young Stanley, nicknamed ‘Janey’, as a natural leader; the school journal, the *Melburnian*, described him as a ‘sterling ruckman’ who, as captain of the football team, ‘set the team a splendid example of fair and unselfish football.’<sup>15</sup> While having less aptitude as a cricketer, he retained a position in the school’s first eleven by competent wicket-keeping.<sup>16</sup> Guido Baracchi, several years Stanley’s junior at school and later influential in the Communist Party of Australia, recalled the lasting impression made on him by the oratory of Alfred Deakin on school speech days, then added:

But at the school it was S. M. Bruce who, as Captain of the School, was more immediately my hero. He was in the Sixth Form while I was still in the ‘Shell’ so-called, but in a spare hour I used to sit in at the English class conducted by ‘Pa’ Robin which Bruce attended and would anticipate with pride the friendly smile and nod with which he always greeted me at the end.<sup>17</sup>

The friendly smile, however, masked a difficult home life. The family into which Stanley was born was a troubled one on which a series of financial setbacks and

personal tragedies were to fall. In 1887 John Bruce had taken his wife and all the children to England for two years; the older brothers, Ernest, William and Robert, had gone to school at Eastbourne, while the young Stanley received his early education from a governess. Not long after the family returned to Melbourne, the Australian colonies had plunged into depression. John Bruce was particularly affected by the collapse of the Victorian banks in 1894, losing nearly all the money he had made hitherto.<sup>18</sup> He was forced to sell his Toorak mansion and even temporarily to withdraw the ten-year-old Stanley from preparatory school because he could not afford the fees. Meanwhile, the British-based partners, becoming concerned by the declining profitability of the company, blamed John Bruce and sent out a representative to report on affairs in the colonies. In 1897, reacting to this pressure from his partners, John Bruce took the risky step of incurring a large debt to buy them out. He obtained help from the Yorkshire connections which supplied his firm with many of its goods, and the Bank of New South Wales gave him a loan of £100,000 on the security of what Stanley would later describe as 'so far as I can see no assets at all'.<sup>19</sup> By these means he floated Paterson, Laing and Bruce as a limited liability company and acquired enough shares to become its first chairman of directors and majority shareholder. John Bruce's reaction to the Depression of the 1890s would be paralleled later by his son Stanley's pivotal role in helping Australia to avoid national bankruptcy in the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In 1899, when Stanley was 16 and still at school, his second-eldest brother, William Crawford, then aged 23, threw himself under a train at Rockdale Station in Sydney. William had journeyed there one month previously to receive treatment at Bayview House, a private asylum for patients admitted voluntarily under the *Lunacy Act* 1898 of New South Wales.<sup>20</sup> The family may have kept the circumstances of William's death from Stanley, but it seems more likely that Stanley came to know about it and deliberately kept the shameful event from his first biographer.<sup>21</sup>

Another tragedy followed in 1901, only two years later: just when Stanley had risen to a position of leadership at Melbourne Grammar, his father, while on a business trip, died in Paris on 4 May. The family attributed John Bruce's death to complications arising from diabetes and 'wear and tear on his own and the community's behalf'.<sup>22</sup> The unpalatable truth was that John Bruce had taken his own life only two years after the death of his son William.<sup>23</sup> John Bruce was at the time under pressure from the London directors of the company, who were severely critical of his takeover of Lark, Sons & Co. in Sydney in 1899.<sup>24</sup> This had resulted in Lark's successfully suing E. P. Truman, the Sydney director of Paterson, Laing and Bruce, for the loss of their positions as managing directors of their own company. Still anguished by William's death, John Bruce and Truman met with the directors of their company in London. On the way home, they

checked into the Hotel Regina in Paris, where John Bruce died after falling from a window. A subsequent police investigation concluded that he had jumped to his death while suffering from depression.<sup>25</sup> Nearly 20 years later Stanley's much loved eldest brother, Ernest, died in a convalescent home in Buckinghamshire, not long after the armistice, on 17 April 1919.<sup>26</sup> The tragedy of this untimely death was aggravated because Ernest had shot himself with his revolver 'while temporarily insane', a rubric used at the time to encompass a wide range of conditions including what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder and clinical depression.<sup>27</sup> Ernest's suicide probably had an even greater emotional impact on Stanley than the earlier death of his father. Ernest had taken a paternal interest in his youngest brother, whom he recognized as the great talent of the family. He had nurtured Stanley's career and Stanley in turn had appreciated his oldest brother's help and love, which he had particularly valued after their father's death left the entire family in financial turmoil.

After the death of John Bruce in 1901, Mary Ann Bruce and her children inherited his shares, but they also acquired his debts and a business in a precarious financial position. Although Stanley would later become famous for his wealth, his personal fortune fluctuated throughout his life from periods of real affluence to others when his business did not prosper and he relied on an income from the public purse. The year of his father's death, and coincidentally



John Munro Bruce (seated) with Directors of Paterson, Laing and Bruce in 1899

the birth of the Commonwealth of Australia, was one of uncertainty for Stanley. The company's main creditor, the Bank of New South Wales, gave his mother an allowance of £1,000 per year to support the whole family, and the Laing estate also lent the family £30,000.<sup>28</sup> In straitened circumstances, Stanley went into the family business immediately after leaving school, working for 30 shillings per week, but his decision to take a degree from Cambridge University reflected the young man's ambition and his determination to obtain the best possible education.<sup>29</sup> He borrowed money from his sister, the only member of the family to have inherited ready cash from their father's estate, and in 1902 set off for Cambridge accompanied by his mother and sister; neither returned to Australia – both died within a decade.<sup>30</sup> Bruce described Mary as an invalid and a 'cripple', possibly because of the kidney problems which contributed to her death while only in her thirties. For ten years, the young bachelor was the principal guardian of these two women, who took rooms in Cambridge while the young Stanley studied for his degree. Bruce later recalled that 'my crippled sister became a close friend of most of my friends and on the whole I think they liked her better than they liked me'.<sup>31</sup>

Stanley entered Trinity Hall in 1902, graduating in 1905 with third class honours in the Law tripos. Founded in 1350 and the fifth-oldest college of Cambridge University, Trinity Hall, with its riverside site hidden between larger neighbours, tended to attract students destined for careers in law or business. A colonial outsider and an average scholar, 'Bruggins', as the young Bruce was nicknamed, attained popularity with his peers because of his athletic abilities, rowing in the Cambridge crew which beat Oxford in 1904 and then becoming a highly successful coach of other Cambridge crews.<sup>32</sup> Leaving Cambridge, he became a pupil at Ashurst, Morris, Crisp & Co., a firm of solicitors which employed between 40 and 50 men and boys and was earning tidy profits of about £50,000 per year. One of the firm's partners, Edward Ashurst Morris, had also been educated at Trinity Hall while another, William Capel Slaughter, had married one of Bruce's cousins.<sup>33</sup> In the first year of his pupillage Stanley was attached to one of the partners of the firm, John Stevenson. It was clear that, despite Stevenson's stern manner, he had a fatherly regard for Bruce that was welcomed by a young man who had so recently lost his own father.<sup>34</sup>

While Stanley was embarking on his legal career in Britain, Ernest devoted himself to the family business in Australia. Ernest received little help from his younger brother Robert, a wayward and feckless youth who took jobs on various country properties in New South Wales and Queensland in the first decade of the new century.<sup>35</sup> From 1906 to 1908 Ernest and Stanley waged a campaign to wrest the management of the company from other shareholders and return it to the control of the family of John Bruce. The principal shareholders, besides the two brothers, were the families of Paterson and Laing, and the estate of one of John Bruce's brothers, the civil engineer William Duff Bruce, the latter's

estate being represented by William Capel Slaughter. After John Bruce's death in 1901, Slaughter had persuaded the London board to accept Sir George Touch as chairman of the company for a five-year term from 1901 to 1906 and, as an inducement, to remunerate him with more than 10,000 of John Bruce's family's shares. When Touch's term as chairman was about to expire, Slaughter proposed that it be extended and that John Bruce's family should part with a further 10,000 shares to remunerate him for a second five-year term. The power to appoint the chairman was vested in the London directors of the company, but the London board had an obligation to consult the Australian boards, and Ernest energetically lobbied them to recommend the appointment of Stanley, only recently graduated from Cambridge, as acting chairman in place of Touch.<sup>36</sup>

Ernest finally convinced the Australian directors to support Stanley and also persuaded Touch to retire, but his efforts to persuade older, more experienced Australian directors to yield their place to the young Stanley caused bad feeling.<sup>37</sup> Slaughter, moreover, who had strongly opposed the removal of Touch, precipitately sold the Duff Bruce interest to other shareholders for the modest sum of eight shillings for each one pound share without consulting the family of John Bruce. Stanley later recalled sending a letter to Slaughter complaining of this and Stevenson's redrafting it to make it 'scarifying'.<sup>38</sup> In 1906, despite this contretemps with Slaughter, Stanley became acting chairman of Paterson, Laing and Bruce at the age of 23, only two years after graduating from Cambridge, before leaving the London solicitors or even qualifying to practise law.

A year later Ernest confided to colleagues that the young man was shaping 'remarkably well' and could safely be left in the position until something more permanent was arranged.<sup>39</sup> In the boardrooms Stanley developed such a talent for chairing meetings that he would later be described as the best of the chairmen of committees of the League of Nations in Geneva. Meanwhile, after his year as a pupil ended, Bruce was called to the bar and Stevenson arranged for him to be taken into the chambers of H. E. Wright, a leading junior in company law in the equity jurisdiction. In his first year as a barrister Bruce was making £600 a year from the solicitors with whom he had read.<sup>40</sup>

In 1908 Ernest influenced the other Australian directors to support Stanley's confirmation as chairman of the company. Ernest had once more to exert some pressure in his brother's interest but, by 13 October 1908, he had been successful in securing Stanley's position, congratulating his brother: 'I am sure your appointment is in the interest of the Company and was the only solution of the problem we had to face unless we were to take an outside chairman altogether'.<sup>41</sup> By 1910 the company had accumulated reserves of £100,000, and in 1911 both Ernest and Stanley were drawing £5,000 per annum from the family estate and business, or 50 times an average family's wages, which were at that time between £90 and £100 per year.<sup>42</sup>

Stanley managed to chair the London directors while simultaneously pursuing his legal career. Made responsible for raising 50,000 debentures, he demonstrated his inventiveness and entrepreneurial ability by asking the company's insurers to underwrite the debenture issue in return for acquiring the insurance business of Paterson, Laing and Bruce. When the company's marine insurer refused, Bruce persuaded another firm to agree.<sup>43</sup> Such financial organizing ability stood Bruce in good stead for the period later on in the 1930s when, as resident minister and then high commissioner in London, he was given responsibility for renegotiating Australia's debt to British bondholders. As chairman of a large public company he also acquired significant experience in influencing and managing powerful and sometimes difficult people. In order to keep the business profitable, moreover, he became attuned to adjusting supply to the ever-changing levels of demand in Australia and to minimizing costs, for example of labour, freight and insurance. He would later bring these perspectives with him to the task of leading the government of the Commonwealth of Australia, which he conceived of as Paterson, Laing and Bruce writ large.

On 16 January 1912 Bruce travelled to South America in order to gather evidence for an English company which had bought a rubber estate in Colombia.<sup>44</sup> Accepting such a task, which involved travel to South America and the learning of Spanish, demonstrated Bruce's openness to foreign cultures and confidence in his own abilities. His success in projects of this kind demonstrated an early knack for the arts of persuasion on which he would call, with varying degrees of success, later in life in Australian and international politics.

In the same year that Bruce went to South America, Ethel Dunlop Anderson, whom Bruce had known as a child in Australia, travelled to England, chaperoned by one of her married sisters. When he had first become acquainted with Ethel as a young man in Melbourne, his prospects were uncertain, but by 1912 Bruce was a successful barrister, wealthy businessman, and a most eligible bachelor. Ethel was the daughter of Andrew George Anderson and granddaughter of Thomas Manifold, scion of a prominent 'squatter' family from the Western District of Victoria.<sup>45</sup> Her Irish great-grandfather, a naval officer and colonial administrator, had been a pioneer in Tasmania and she, like Stanley, was of Scottish ancestry but with an Irish grandmother. Stanley Bruce and Ethel Anderson were married in July 1913 at a Church of England vicarage near Henley, for whose Regatta Bruce was at the time coaching crews: he was 30 and his wife three years older. It was a quiet wedding, taking place in the year after his mother's death; a friend of Stanley, Ethel's sister and the chauffeur were the only others present.<sup>46</sup>

This low-key wedding was a sign of their future married life: throughout it, the Bruces had many acquaintances but a smaller circle of close friends, and they depended on each other for companionship and support. Ethel was completely devoted to Stanley. He reciprocated this affection with a great solicitude for a wife

whose health was often fragile. The pair were well matched with Ethel sharing her husband's outlook and many of his tastes, including golf, a sport in which she excelled, and a love of the theatre.<sup>47</sup> She regularly addressed him as 'S' and he often used the late Victorian 'old girl'.<sup>48</sup> They spent their honeymoon in Canada and the United States. They were not destined to have children of their own, but they were both fond of other people's children and were particularly close to Ernest's daughters, Helen and Lindsay.<sup>49</sup>

After being based for more than a decade in England, Stanley returned to Australia, temporarily exchanging positions with Ernest and chairing meetings of the Melbourne directors of Paterson, Laing and Bruce in July, September and December 1914.<sup>50</sup> In his years of expatriation Bruce had been moulded by upper middle class English society to such a degree that, as the Australian journalist Warren Denning put it, he acquired 'that quality of aloofness from the Australian man in the street which forever separated him from the heart of his own country; it left him even in his political heyday a foreigner in his own land, a man out of touch with the people he was leading'.<sup>51</sup> When war broke out in September of that year, the company adopted a positive attitude to its employees enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), which Stanley could have chosen to join. He did not join the AIF because he had been principally a resident in England since 1902 and because it was easier for people of his class to obtain a commission in the British Army, in which his brothers Ernest and Robert were also to serve.<sup>52</sup> A patriotic Australian Briton, Bruce was committed to the doctrine of imperial defence, which in Edwardian times was less about the defence of the British Empire as such than about mobilizing imperial resources under British control for the defence of the United Kingdom against Germany. The military organization of the empire had been standardized and integrated within the British staff organization, renamed the Imperial General Staff, to facilitate contingents from the empire taking their place alongside British troops.<sup>53</sup> The family agreed that Stanley would return to England to enlist, while Ernest would remain in Australia to look after the business.

After enlisting in the Inns of Court regiment, Stanley was sent to Cornwall to join the 12th Worcestershire Regiment, in which he was given a temporary commission as lieutenant on 7 February 1915.<sup>54</sup> He and six other officers, all of whom later died, were then shipped to Egypt to join the Royal Fusiliers.<sup>55</sup> Bruce later said of the battalion which he joined, the 2nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers, that its members 'had been recruited from the slums of London, and as soldiers they appeared to be hopeless . . . [I]t was the traditions of the army and the regiment that made it possible for them to be turned into fine soldiers'.<sup>56</sup> The remark was indicative of how the liberalism inherited from his father had been tinged with conservatism and of the high value which Bruce placed on order, tradition, structure and discipline not only for the successful operation of the army but for society more broadly.

The 2nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers had returned from Calcutta to England in January 1915 and joined the 29th Division which was then assigned to Turkey, a theatre of war in which Bruce's countrymen were also to have their first major military experience. The Ottoman Empire, which controlled the strategically important Dardanelles Straits connecting the Mediterranean with the Black Sea, had joined the war on Germany's side against Britain, France and Russia in October 1914. The Allied Powers reasoned that if they could seize and hold the Straits, they could knock Turkey out of the war, open up a supply line to the embattled Russians and perhaps also induce a Balkan intervention on the side of the Allies. Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, was one of the most prominent British advocates of the Dardanelles strategy. Churchill, who was to play a significant role in Bruce's future career, initially believed that the Royal Navy would be able to force a passage through the Dardanelles and persuaded his Cabinet colleagues to send 18 battleships there in February 1915. When the ships were unable to force a passage through the Straits, the Admiralty approached Sir Ian Hamilton, commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, with a request to assist the navy by making an amphibious landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Hamilton's command included the British 29th Division, in which Bruce was then a subaltern, and colonial troops from the Antipodes who had just been formed into the Australia New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) under the command of Major-General William Birdwood.

Hamilton conceived a plan to land British and French forces on five beaches, code-named X, Y, V, W and S, at Cape Helles on the toe of the peninsula. From these beaches they were to take the range known as Achi Baba, while the Anzacs were to land near Gaba Tepe, ten miles north of Helles, and take Hill 971 on Sari Bair. The strategy was to capture these two heights, from them subdue the Turkish forts with artillery and thereby dominate the Straits. On 25 April 1915 the Anzacs went ashore at Ari Burnu, later called Anzac Cove, but landing in confusion on a small beach they encountered strong resistance from the Turks, whose defences at Anzac Cove were commanded by Mustafa Kemal, a young Ottoman colonel of about Bruce's age who was destined, like Churchill, to have a continuing influence on Bruce's life after 1915. Determined to throw the attackers into the sea, Kemal counter-attacked with significant cost to both sides and prevented an Anzac breakthrough.<sup>57</sup> On the evening of 25 April, Birdwood's subordinate commanders recommended evacuation, but Hamilton responded by ordering his men to dig in, thus beginning the period of eight months of fruitless trench warfare on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

As the Anzacs launched the attack at Ari Burnu, British battleships and tugs carrying the men of the 29th Division stood off the Helles coast. The vessels carrying the Royal Fusiliers and Bruce to X Beach on the western tip of Cape Helles landed without casualties on a narrow strip of sand at the base of steep

cliffs, where their arrival had not been anticipated.<sup>58</sup> Helles, which had been an agricultural area before the war, was surrounded by the sea on three sides and, with many of the sights of the mythological world of Ancient Greece in view, was a place of extraordinary beauty that left a lasting impression on the classically educated Bruce, who acquired a lifelong affection for Asia Minor and the Aegean, and later, for Turkey.<sup>59</sup>

After the Turks repulsed an Allied assault known as the Second Battle of Krithia (6 to 8 May), the period in Helles from 8 May to 4 June was one in which neither side launched a major attack on the other. This was a time of digging and extending trenches and patrolling, which was dangerous for Bruce and his comrades. They were at constant risk of Turkish sniper fire as they moved about the trenches or perhaps incautiously raised their heads to look at the ships in the bay. The constant artillery bombardment was unnerving and, as the weather became hotter, the stench of unburied corpses in 'no man's land' assailed their nostrils. In such conditions, it was understandable that a man like Bruce might sometimes feel the temptation to 'go over the top' and risk a direct attack on the enemy instead of being pinned down in the trenches. This was a metaphor upon which he would sometimes draw during his later political career in Australia.

Lieutenant Bruce, tall, athletic and with the leadership skills which he had honed at Melbourne Grammar, and practical experience as a military cadet, proved adept at both leading men and digging trenches. This skill probably saved his life. His battalion was preparing for a major attack on 4 June and the day before the scheduled attack, Bruce, as a recognized trench expert, was ordered to take out a party from a Scots regiment to site a support trench and dig it before the action commenced.<sup>60</sup> Thinking that he was standing in a safe position, Bruce suddenly exclaimed to his commanding officer: 'My God, I believe I've been hit.'<sup>61</sup> Luckily Bruce's arm had been bent at the time; the Turkish bullet went in one side and out the other and a flesh wound was the only result. Nonetheless, Bruce was sent to a hospital to recuperate. This was fortunate for him: in the attack on 4 June that proceeded without him, Bruce's battalion suffered serious casualties and, years afterwards on an anniversary of his wounding, he remarked to Alfred Stirling that he must have been kept on earth 'for some purpose.'<sup>62</sup> One participant described the attack which he had missed to the journalist, Ashmead Bartlett, as a 'cold-blooded massacre.'<sup>63</sup> Ethel was briefly reunited with her husband at the hospital and must have feared that she would never see him again.

On 28 June, after several weeks of sick leave, Bruce returned to the 29th Division, just after his battalion had been involved in another costly British and Indian attack on Gully Spur.<sup>64</sup> By now the Gallipoli Peninsula was brutally hot: the nights were stifling and swarms of flies settled on the men during the day. After a new attack conceived on 12 and 13 July, one soldier commented that Helles 'looked like a midden and smelt like an opened cemetery.'<sup>65</sup> In August 1915 the 29th Division

was ordered from Helles to a new front opened to the north of Anzac Cove at Suvla Bay.<sup>66</sup> A sergeant at Suvla Bay saw them coming ashore: 'They looked pretty grim and woebegone. In fact they looked like the rest of us': among them was Stanley Bruce, a temporary captain since 5 August.<sup>67</sup> The Allied plan now embraced the capture of Kiretch Tepe and Tekke Tepe: the 29th Division would advance from a point near Chocolate Hill towards Scimitar Hill, while the 11th Division would attack the 'W' Hills, and a composite Anzac force of 3,000 men would attack Hill 60. The offensive was timed for the early afternoon of 21 August and the plan was that the men would advance with the sun behind them, but a totally unexpected mist descended just after noon so that the 'battle was fought in a veil of swirling haze and stifling heat.'<sup>68</sup> The light was beginning to fail as the men of the 29th Division reached Chocolate Hill but they were still ordered forward into the gloom; the Turks brought up their reserves and the British, with the loss of 5,000 casualties, advanced not at all. In this engagement Bruce distinguished himself when he led a patrol to the right of his battalion's position and discovered that it was not linked properly with a Brigade of Yeomanry.<sup>69</sup>

A military citation supporting his Military Cross read: 'Accompanied by two men he carried out a difficult night enterprise after the action of 21 August, and brought in two officers and forty men of another unit who had been isolated.' As well as the Military Cross, he won the *Croix de Guerre avec palme*.<sup>70</sup> Characteristically modest, Bruce later recounted that the French had given many of these awards, that one had been given to the Royal Fusiliers, and that the Royal Fusiliers had passed it on to him.<sup>71</sup> This was clearly an understatement of the qualities required to distinguish an officer in the conditions experienced by the 2nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers which, in the six weeks up to a brief period for recuperation on the island of Imbros on 8 September, had been continuously under rifle- and gunfire in the front trenches.<sup>72</sup>

The failure of the August offensive disillusioned the British government, which now urged a complete evacuation from the Dardanelles, and in December 1915 and January 1916, the Anzacs on Gallipoli and the remaining forces at Helles were stealthily evacuated. But in the meantime, Bruce had been wounded again, shot through the knee on 23 September while working at an advanced post.<sup>73</sup> This second wound temporarily incapacitated him but did not permanently cripple him; it also spared him from years on the western front in France and Belgium that his comrades and his eldest brother were to experience. Winston Churchill, the chief architect of the disaster, left the government with his reputation in tatters and joined the army; it would be years before his political career would recover. Kemal had taken the first step on a path that eventually took him to the presidency of the Turkish Republic. Bruce in no way became a pacifist but was nevertheless left with an abiding detestation of war, a sense that it must be engaged in only as a last resort, and the view that strategically flawed military



Portrait of Captain Bruce

adventures such as the Gallipoli Campaign should not be hazarded in the future. Bruce's war experiences underpinned what later became his liberal internationalist principles in the 1930s and 1940s, conditioned his supportive attitude towards appeasement of fascism in the 1930s and influenced his strategic criticisms of Churchill as Prime Minister of Britain in the Second World War.

The wounding of Captain Stanley Bruce in September 1915 meant that he did not follow the 29th Division to Europe and a probable death on the fields of France. Instead he returned to Australia and fortuitously to the prime minister-ship of his country. Although he had fought with the British Army rather than the AIF, his first-hand experience of what his countrymen had achieved in Gallipoli awoke in him a new pride in Australia and a mission to do what he could, in peace as in war, for his country of birth.<sup>74</sup>

Like many Australian families, the Bruce family had agreed at the start of the war that Stanley should enlist, while his eldest brother Ernest, a Boer War veteran, should manage the affairs of Paterson, Laing and Bruce in Australia.<sup>75</sup> The Bruce family agreement went awry in 1915 when Ernest decided to enlist in the Royal Field Artillery despite being about 40 and having a shattered left arm.<sup>76</sup> Ernest went through the worst of the fighting in France and Belgium, won the Military Cross and reached the rank of major.<sup>77</sup> This made it imperative for Stanley to return to Australia to see to the affairs of Paterson, Laing and Bruce while his

brother continued to fight on the western front. Having been on sick leave in England for almost a year, Bruce wrote to the War Office on 25 September 1916, seeking leave to resign his commission.<sup>78</sup>

This the War Office refused. A medical board examined him in England on 27 October, recommended him for five months' sick leave and reminded him that no British officer on leave was allowed to leave the United Kingdom without the permission of the Army Council.<sup>79</sup> He duly received permission and he sailed to Australia before the expiry of his five months' leave. He was examined in Australia on 27 January by another medical board which recommended a further period of five months' leave from 28 March 1917.<sup>80</sup> The War Office disagreed and instructed Bruce to return to England if fit to travel.<sup>81</sup>

By this time Bruce had come to the favourable attention of the Australian government. During the course of 1917 he had been persuaded to address a number of recruiting meetings on behalf of the government; as a decorated war hero on crutches he fitted the role exceedingly well and spoke persuasively. This may have been one of the reasons why the Prime Minister of Australia, William Morris Hughes, approached the British military authorities on Bruce's behalf. A week before 10 May 1917, the day when Bruce was expected to board SS *Niagara* for England, the War Office received a communication from Hughes supporting his demobilization.<sup>82</sup> Hughes's intervention and reports from two eminent surgeons in Sydney and Melbourne on Bruce's fitness persuaded the War Office to change its decision.<sup>83</sup> The *London Gazette* reported that Bruce had relinquished his commission in the British Army on 9 June 1917.<sup>84</sup>

Stanley Bruce would no doubt have believed in 1917 that he would not have to stay in Australia much beyond the ending of hostilities when his brother would return to Melbourne. But Ernest never returned to Australia, dying in England in 1919, by which time Stanley was a member of the Australian parliament. By 1919, except for his brother Robert who saw service in the British Army Service Corps from July 1917, all his immediate family had died.<sup>85</sup> These deaths, occurring one after the other over the space of two decades – William in 1899, John in 1901, Mary in 1908, Mary Ann in 1912 and Ernest in 1919 – undoubtedly combined with his war experiences to accentuate the feeling that his survival had been providential.<sup>86</sup> With his own childlessness added to the mix, Bruce was left with a sense of insecurity and melancholy, which his calm exterior belied, and a driving ambition to make something of a life which providence had spared. If depression was a trait in the Bruce family, there is evidence from his later career that Stanley may have also had to contend with this debilitating condition, particularly towards the end of the prime ministership in Australia which lay ahead of him. In the meantime, by 1917, the war had drastically changed the direction of Bruce's life. As a result of the vicissitudes of the war, he returned to Australia, decided to stay and was persuaded to embark on a life in Australian politics.