



Things that make you go hmmm

The Lucky Country

"Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people's ideas, and, although its ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise."

– Donald Horne, *The Lucky Country*

"The people are immensely likable— cheerful, extrovert, quick-witted, and unfailingly obliging. Their cities are safe and clean and nearly always built on water. They have a society that is prosperous, well ordered, and instinctively egalitarian. The food is excellent. The beer is cold. The sun nearly always shines. There is coffee on every corner. Life doesn't get much better than this."

– Bill Bryson, *In a Sunburned Country*

"The fairies, as their custom, clapped their hands with delight over their cleverness, and they were so madly in love with the little house that they could not bear to think they had finished it."

– J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*

"When ill luck begins, it does not come in sprinkles, but in showers."

– Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

"Above all, he liked it that everything was one's own fault. There was only oneself to praise or blame. Luck was a servant and not a master. Luck had to be accepted with a shrug or taken advantage of up to the hilt. But it had to be understood and recognized for what it was and not confused with a faulty appreciation of the odds, for, at gambling, the deadly sin is to mistake bad play for bad luck. And luck in all its moods had to be loved and not feared"

– Ian Fleming, *Casino Royale*

THINGS THAT MAKE YOU GO HMMM...

THE LUCKY COUNTRY



Australians all 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 then let us sing
Advance Australia fair.

There are few places on Earth which abound in nature's gifts to the extent Australia does and its national anthem celebrates the fact both proudly and—whenever one of Australia's representative sports teams appears in competition anywhere in the world—at great volume.

Those gifts include (as the anthem points out) both the rich AND the rare.

Australia is truly blessed with the rich. It is home to sizable deposits of bauxite, coal, copper, tin, gold, iron ore, silver, uranium, tungsten, nickel, rare earth elements, lead, zinc, diamonds, mineral sands, natural gas and petroleum.

It is also home to the rare—though most of the items that fall into this particular category seem to be animals which can be deadly to human beings such as Great White sharks, the box jellyfish (no animal on earth has the ability to stop a human heart so rapidly), the inland taipan snake (which possesses venom in sufficient quantities to kill 100 men), the blue-ringed octopus (a beautiful creature which, nevertheless, produces a neurotoxin 10,000 times more powerful than cyanide)

the Sydney funnel web spider (growing to just 3.5cm in length but possessing fangs capable of piercing a human toenail to deliver its deadly venom) and the legendary but reclusive drop bear (a vicious, carnivorous marsupial found mainly in the Eastern parts of Australia). Anyone interested in these deadly animals can find out more at the [Australian Museum website](#).



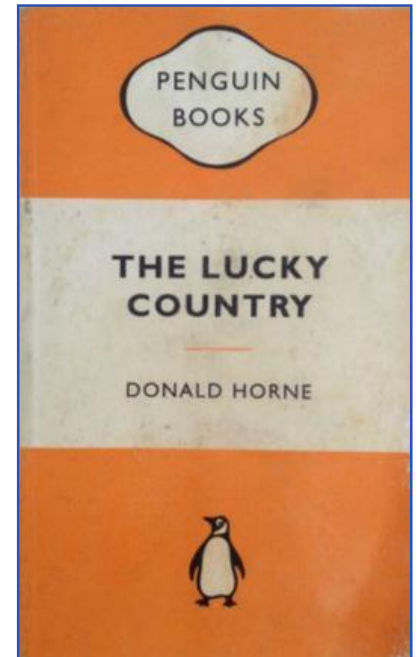
The sobriquet which has become synonymous with Australia over the last half-century is ‘*The Lucky Country*’ and, with its bountiful resources, gorgeous weather, pristine beaches and breathtaking natural beauty, its easy to see why, but the genesis of the phrase comes from an altogether darker place and, though the Land Down Under has seen multiple decades of economic prosperity bring it to a place in the world which, like the strength of its various sporting teams, is far in excess of its meagre population, there are storm clouds looming which herald a future that looks anything but lucky for Australia.

But first, that phrase.

In 1964, journalist and author, Donald Horne wrote a book entitled ‘*The Lucky Country*’ but anybody reading it who found themselves wondering about the origin of the book’s title would have been forced to wait until the opening words of the its final chapter to find out exactly what Horne meant.

The payoff was, unlike the Australian weather, far from sunny:

Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second rate people who share its luck. It lives on other people’s ideas, and, although its ordinary people are adaptable, most of its leaders (in all fields) so lack curiosity about the events that surround them that they are often taken by surprise.



One critic at the time of its release summed up Horne’s book as only an Aussie could, calling it “*A bucket of cold saltwater emptied onto the belly of a dreaming sunbather*”.

Horne’s portrait of 1960s Australia was one of a country which had used its ties to Great Britain and its extraordinary good fortune with regards what lay beneath its soil to further its place in the world and it depicted a population (in 1960 numbering just 10 million) who were both unambitious and deeply conservative.

The book sold a remarkable 100,000 copies in its first year—an amazing feat considering it featured no illustrations...

Dismayed by the misinterpretation of his words, Horne felt the need to clarify his stance a full dozen years later in a follow-up he called (in an attempt to remove all ambiguity) ‘*Death of a Lucky Country*’

“In the lucky style we have never ‘earned’ our democracy. We simply went along with some British habits,” he said, bemoaning the fact that, with regards *The Lucky Country*, he had been forced “*.. to sit through the most appalling rubbish as successive generations misapplied this phrase.*”



Last August—somewhat ironically given Horne’s view of Australia’s leaders—Tony Abbott, the country’s incumbent Prime Minister called the publication of Horne’s work ‘*one of the defining moments in Australian history*’.

Abbott himself, it would seem, is most certainly NOT one of those ‘second-rate people’ about whom Horne wrote. No. Based on a recent article published at the National Interest website in the US, Abbott can barely dare to dream about reaching the lofty heights of ‘second-rate.’

The article, entitled “Tony Abbott: The Worst Leader of Any Industrialized Democracy? You Decide.” was, I think it’s fair to say, critical of the man’s leadership:

(National Interest): Is Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott the most incompetent leader of any industrialized democracy? Of course, a leader’s popularity, to some, depends on that leader’s political orientation. Many conservative Republicans think Barack Obama is one of the worst presidents in modern history, while many liberal Spaniards think conservative Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy is one of the worst leaders in Spain’s modern history.

But competence and popularity are not necessarily the same things. Even conservative Republicans would admit that Obama has achieved major accomplishments in office – they just do not like those accomplishments at all. And Obama, Rajoy, and other rich world leaders, whatever their problems, usually seem to be making their policy decisions based on advice from a retinue of advisors and after careful consideration of policy options. Even leaders criticized for acting too slowly, and offering uninspired policy ideas, like French President Francois Hollande, appear to be capable of running their countries’ day-to-day policymaking. There are world leaders who appear dangerously unhinged, making policy based on whims, advice from a tiny handful of advisers, or some other highly unscientific formula. Argentina’s president, Christina Fernandez de Kirchner, comes to mind, as does Ecuador President Rafael Correa, North Korea’s Kim Jong-un, or Russia’s Vladimir Putin. But none of these leaders run a rich and powerful democracy.

Tony Abbott, however, is in charge of a regional power, a country that is the twelfth largest economy in the world and the only rich world nation to have survived the 2008-9 financial crisis unscathed. Yet in less than two years as prime minister, Abbott has proven shockingly incompetent, which is why other leaders within his ruling coalition, following a set of defeats in state elections, may now scheme to unseat him. They should: Abbott has proven so incapable of clear policy thinking, so unwilling to consult with even his own ministers and advisers, and so poor at communicating that he has to go.

Now, Aussies can be counted upon to rally round their countrymen in times of crisis and circle the wagons—particularly when being attacked from the outside—(the idea of ‘Mateship’ is a core Aussie value) but, in Abbott’s case, they seem to be making an exception.



The silence in defence of the PM from within Australia was deafening. The article continued:



Abbott's policies have been all over the map, and the lack of coherence has often made the prime minister seem ill-informed and incapable of understanding complex policy issues. In press conferences, Abbott has offered mixed public messages about some of the health care reforms that were at the center of his agenda, and sometimes has seemed unsure himself of what health legislation has actually been passed on his watch. He also has seemed unsure of what he promised in the past regarding Australia's major public broadcaster

– he promised not to touch it – before he went ahead made cuts to it. He also looked completely baffled on climate change issues at the G20 summit in Australia last year.

Abbott also does not seem to think it necessary to even discuss policy proposals with his top ministers and other leading members of his conservative coalition. His lack of consultation has made it harder for him to pass some critical legislation. In addition, he appears to have one of the worst senses of public relations of any prime minister in recent Australian history. At major economic summits, he has embarrassed Australia with his coarse rhetoric. He recently decided to give an Australian knighthood to Prince Philip, husband of British Queen Elizabeth II, even though nearly half of Australians would prefer the country to be a republic, and even those who support the monarchy disdain actions that look like Canberra sucking up to the British royals.

Now, while this is all well and good, for a man of Abbott's questionable leadership to be at the helm of the good ship Australia at this particular point in its history could well be more deadly to the country's fortunes than any of the dangerous creatures which inhabit its shores are to the average tourist.

Abbot has inherited a country which looks to be upon the brink of a decline which may well be generational in nature and that spells trouble for The Lucky Country. Abbott's shortcomings notwithstanding (real or perceived), were he even a competent leader, it still may not be enough to avert a crisis in the land 'girt by sea.'

Allow me to elaborate.

First, the good stuff.