

Six Problems in the Biography of Alfred Deakin

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Judith Brett's *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin* constitutes the fifth biographical study of Alfred Deakin. It succeeds the admiring salute of Murdoch (1999 [1923]), the inscriptional chronicle of La Nauze (1965), the revelatory exposé of Gabay (1992) and the waggish sallies of Rickard (1996). We now have Brett's full-length portrait of the man, in all his parts (Brett, 2017).

But the topic of Alfred Deakin will not be exhausted by even this attention. Let me nominate six problems that remain for future biographers to puzzle over.

1. Deakin's spiritualism

Deakin was a committed spiritualist.

Contemporary observers—you and me—are baffled by how Deakin could so readily soak up such twaddle. His biographers have sought to reconcile his spiritualism into our own understanding by means of two strategies. Both are 'apologetic' in some measure.

1. **Minimisation.** Murdoch and La Nauze present Deakin's spiritualism as a youthful *jeu d'esprit*. This contention, however, became untenable with the remarkable disclosures of Gabay. And Brett has reinforced Gabay with further details of how much Deakin's spiritualist activities extended into his maturity. As late as 1891—the same year he was a delegate at the Federation Convention—Deakin was seeking guidance from the séances of the dubious Mrs Cohen.
2. **Rationalisation in terms of rationality.** Gabay and Brett are inclined to present spiritualism as a wayward progeny of the conquering rationalism of Deakin's

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age; a spawn of the decomposition of dogmatic Christianity, and the quickening of 'free thought'. Spiritualism, it is held reinforcingly, is rooted in some of the infant, if erroneous, investigations of human mind; mesmerism and phrenology.

But any attempt to claim spiritualism as one rationalist precipitate of the dissolution of Christianity falls at the starting gate. It is no triumph of the critical intellect to refuse to believe that the dead may be restored to life, but firmly believe they may be talked to. Spiritualism—need it be stated?—was grossly antithetical to science. It was, specifically, devoid of the key impersonality of science, and beholden to what might be called a suite of self-selected miracle workers. Given this, there may be a temptation to reverse direction, and trace Deakin's spiritualism to deficiency in his critical faculty. Deakin's mind was essentially artistic, was it not? So we dispose of Deakin's spiritualism by invoking his inclination to gambol in the folds of fancy. But this is too pat: it is an unnerving truth that several distinguished natural scientists, and Cambridge philosophers, were firm adherents to spiritualism—or at least sympathisers.

Rather than diagnose spiritualism as a product of its believers' rationality or irrationality, it might be more useful to seek its success in how it served the values of the period in which it thrived; the mid-19th century to about 1930, a near-normal life span of someone born in Deakin's birth year, 1856.

Spiritualism gratified one key value of its age; an intense individualism. Historically, individualism had, in religion, been expressed through Protestantism. This had eliminated, first, the rule of the priest, then later the rule of scripture, and then, with 'modernism', even the rule of the Almighty. But one restraint remained; the fundamental and near unbridgeable chasm between This World and The Next. It was spiritualism that destroyed this last constraint on the individual will. It annihilated the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane; in its own language, it allowed you to sweep aside the 'flimsy film' between the two worlds. You were no longer confined in This World; you could summon your dead loved ones at chez Cohen, with almost as much ease as you could buy there a pound of nuts from her almond tree. Granted: it is this destruction of the distinction between the sacred and the profane of that made spiritualism so vulgar, sometimes hilariously so. But here was a doctrine that gratified the invincible will of a Syme and hundreds of others of his ilk. Including Alfred Deakin.

When conjoined to the equality that Deakin's age also aspired to, individualism additionally served spiritualism by a second, if indirect, route: by repudiating a necessary foe of spiritualism—intellectual authority. If individualism and equality are taken literally, then all authority is redundant. And not just religious authority, but also scientific authority. Thus the 19th century was not only the age of spiritualism, but also flat earth propagandising. And it is no great surprise that there was an

overlap in membership of these two movements (Gardwood, 2007). Individualism and equality, taken literally, freed one from religion; and from science, too. Thus spiritualism: bad science, and still worse religion.

The significance of spiritualism being so congenial to its age is that Deakin was so acutely of his own age. The man was rootless; quite without any tie with the past, such as grandparents or family history. He was wholly of his newborn, ‘instant society’ of Melbourne; a society that was not only, inevitably, without memory, but one that with an equal inevitability identified itself with the new.

So to formulate the thesis: Deakin, being so perfectly of his point in time, was vulnerable to the religious responses that were so characteristic of the time.

2. Frederick Deeming

Frederick Deeming was a serial killer who in 1892, amid great publicity, was put on trial for murder in Melbourne, and executed. His defence counsel was Alfred Deakin. Why would Deakin choose to take on the defence of a psychopath? Ordinary financial motives did not apply; Deakin was not remunerated. So: why would a politician in mid-career take on a case seemingly prejudicial to the future success of that career?

His biographers treat this incident briefly and without explanation. Deakin’s enemies did not forget it, but neither do they explain.

The authors of the one extended study of Deeming case suggest of Deakin: ‘Presumably he believed that the Deeming case would help restore his name as a barrister’ (Gurvich & Wray, 2000, p. 202).² So a spectacular victory would make Deakin’s reputation, just as Paddy Crick had won a reputation with the Buttner case 1889; and, in 1904, came within a Governor’s scruple of becoming Premier of New South Wales. Or as G.H. Reid acquired prestige in 1888 in securing, by means of his ‘brilliant cross-examination’, the acquittal of one of the accused in the Mt Rennie rape case (McMinn, 1989, p. 41).

There is another possibility: Deakin’s willingness to take the case arose from his own peculiar views on the mind, arising from his spiritualism. Deakin’s defence of Deeming was that he was ‘insane’. Insanity is a weak descriptor of Deeming: he was plainly a sociopath and not a psychotic. But mental illness was poorly understood; thus Deakin’s ridiculous suggestion that Deeming could have committed the murder in an epileptic fit. Might Deakin have had a particular interest in the ‘Sacred

2 The word ‘restore’ is unsuitable: Deakin had no reputation as a barrister in 1892.

Disease'? He believed, or at least claimed, that he had written a book—*A New Pilgrim's Progress*—in a frenzy of 'automatic writing', where he had lost his mind to some directing other.³

Neither of these candidate motivations, however, reduce the damage Deakin's career would presumably have suffered if he had actually won. Reid politically benefited from extricating his client from the dock only because the public believed that the Mt Rennie accused had not received justice. Similarly, Ernest Buttner was probably innocent of rape, and Crick was probably saving an innocent man.

Was it possible that in 1892 Deakin had abandoned hope of a further political career?

3. Sexual orientation

Put simply, 'was Deakin gay?' The answer, it seems, is 'fairly gay'.

We might begin with the fact that, as a boy, he had 'a certain girlishness of appearance' (Murdoch, 1999, p. 20), and was known by his peers at Melbourne Grammar as Miss Deakin, Polly and Pretty Polly. This impression of effeminacy did not, however, survive adolescence, and he disliked receiving the impression of it in others.⁴

As a young adult, Deakin evidently could hold considerable appeal to men much older than himself. Thus a (childless) squatter, Alexander Strachan, bequeathed to him the bulk of his estate. Another squatter, Sydney Grandison Watson, on the basis of slight acquaintance, invited the 23-year-old spiritualist to join him for a 'delightful trip' to Fiji (Deakin, 1957, p. 44). Over even the remote, granitic monolith of David Syme, Deakin appears to have held a distinct beguiling power. Despite the two being 'unlike each other in almost every way' (Sayers, 1976), a close tie grew between them; Deakin was granted the privilege of 'free access to Syme's private room at all hours' (Murdoch, 1999, p. 55).

There was, no doubt, an asymmetry in these attractions. His popularity with elderly men appears to have been of little more than an instrumental value to Deakin. But with men not so different in age, Deakin was certainly emotionally involved on some occasions. A pattern emerges of close attachments to men either a decade or so older than himself, or about a decade younger. In his youth, these include David Mickle, 12 years his senior, and, most importantly, Frederick Derham, businessman and politician to whom Deakin expressed what he betokens as 'that love which passeth the love of woman' (Brett, 2017, p. 109). On his departure overseas, Deakin wrote

3 This is revealed in the book's full title: *A New Pilgrim's Progress: Purported to be Given By John Bunyan, Through an Impressional Medium* (published W.H. Terry, 1877).

4 But A.F. Davies (1973) judged the adult Deakin to be 'covertly feminine'.

to Derham, ‘Men must not seem women but believe me it is a pull on my heart strings to say good bye for you for so long’ (Brett, 2017, p. 125).⁵ The Victorian age was, certainly, an age of agonised partings.⁶

As he moved into middle age, Deakin took the role of the senior member of these dyads; Walter Murdoch (18 years younger) and—above all others—Herbert Brookes (11 years younger) assumed the junior role. As Brett put it, ‘Deakin had no male friend whom he loved, and he took Brookes immediately into his heart’ (Brett, 2017, p. 234).

There is no evidence that these attachments were sexual in act. And it would appear he never conceived them as having a sexual dimension. But to simply categorise them as ‘male friends’ seems to banalise them in a way untrue to their significance. The problem is, how quite to conceive them? The relationship of Syme and Deakin puts in mind nothing more than the king and his male favourite. But how to categorise that? Part of the difficulty is in translating the words and symbols of the 19th century into our own. Thus, while in London in 1887, James Service records that Henry Holland, Secretary of State for the Colonies, ‘has fallen in love’ with Deakin (Murdoch, 1999, p. 116). We are left wondering how much is the past another country; or, how much another country is another country.

What may be said with confidence is that Deakin found recreation almost only in male company, and barely at all in female. His remarks on women’s physical attractions rare and terse.⁷ By contrast, his two political memoirs reveal a distinct sensitivity to male beauty. His political allies are ‘handsome’ (Quick, described in Deakin, 1944, p. 55), ‘extremely handsome’ (Playford, described in Deakin, 1944, p. 29), and ‘one of the handsomest young fellows I have ever seen’ (a youthful supporter in Victoria, described in Deakin, 1957, p. 49). And Barton had ‘eyes of remarkable beauty’ (Deakin, 1944, p. 32). The significance of these observations is reinforced by Deakin’s disdainful references to the (heterosexual) love shack that was NSW politics of the day: Reid is a ‘squire of dames’ (Deakin, 1944, p. 52), Jack Want is Reid’s ‘brother bachelor’ (Deakin, 1957, p. 54). In venting his seething contempt of William Lyne, Deakin notes, with an air of triumph, that the Premier’s ‘vagaries’ were known to him. I would guess this is a reference to Lyne’s apparent mistress-keeping.⁸

Deakin seems to have been quite beyond the force of female eros.

5 Deakin’s relationship with Derham is wholly ignored by La Nauze and Murdoch.

6 Thus, John Robertson ‘wept like a girl’ (his words) at the harbourside departure for Europe of W.B. Dalley.

7 In a peculiar inversion, he on one occasion refers to a woman as ‘dashing’ (Deakin, 1944, p. 61).

8 In 1911, Lyne was to secretly marry—in Montana—Sarah Olden, 25 years his junior. I am indebted to John Hawkins for this detail.

So what was to be the root of his relations with women? His play *Quentin Massys*—a technically brilliant accomplishment for an 18-year-old—prefigures in miniature his vision of the foundation of male–female relationships; it was a matter of the strong protecting the weak. Desexualised chivalry, in other words. This vision was realised in the domestic ménage Deakin established at the age of 25, with his marriage to Patty Brown. This produced three daughters, but was cold at the core. Both exacerbating this frigidity, and reflecting it, was the peculiarly significant relationship between himself and his sole sibling, Catherine (Kate). ‘I have worshipped the baby as I have the man all our lives’, Kate once declared (Brett, 2017 p. 17). For his part, Deakin seems to have elevated Kate above Patty. In Deakin’s chosen words towards the end of his life (quoted in La Nauze, 1965, p. 11), his father, mother and sister were ‘the Trinity’ under whose ‘shelter, guidance tenderness and forgiveness’ he had lived. His wife is not mentioned.

Thus resulted a disastrous confusion of roles; of wife, sister, daughter.

Kate’s bed was the bridal bed of Alfred and Patty. Alfred expressed a wish for Kate to accompany him on his honeymoon. On their father’s death, Deakin invited Kate to with live with himself and Patty; a mix-up of even oedipal categories. When—at Patty’s bitter protests—Alfred withdrew this invitation, he, in Brett’s words, ‘broke Catherine’s heart’ (2017, p. 191): a somewhat unexpected usage of Brett, but not inappropriate, given the role confusion the Deakin siblings laboured under. In this confusion, Alfred and Kate would make decisions about the three daughters in conferences from which Patty was absent; indeed, unaware of. Kate ‘acts as if she owns the family’ complained Patty, while she was reduced to a nanny; a ‘dearest child’; and even mistaken by strangers for Alfred’s sister.

Does Deakin’s sexual orientation matter? Not in the ‘Alfred the Lawgiver’-type biography of La Nauze. But the topic belongs in any full-length portrait. And the implicit assumption that Deakin was conventionally heterosexual has also prompted false solutions to certain puzzles. At the age of 32, Deakin composed a ‘prayer’ that has left a mystery for biographers:

After again a long silence something has been awakened in me by the burning iron of remorse. Aid me O God to atone for the past and if it be possible to undo even remove the evil done to others. After this enable me to conquer the evil which it had done to others. After this enable me to conquer the evil which it has done to myself and to kill the root of that evil within me. (Deakin, n.d.)

Some have speculated it was a piece of sexual infidelity for which Deakin felt the burning iron of remorse (Langmore, 1992). But there is no evidence for this hypothesis.

So what was ‘the root of that evil’ within him?

4. His final illness

While he still in his 50s, Deakin's epigrammatic, lucid and conjuring mind was overthrown, leaving him, in his own words, 'a shadow in a dream'. Beyond the complete collapse of memory, his symptoms include giddiness, dizziness, exhaustion, a 'wavering' heart, chronic insomnia, weight loss and gastric upsets.

Brett diagnoses this disaster as progressive vascular dementia, produced by hypertension. This hypothesis is simple, and well-hinged on the one objective measurement of his health known to biographers; at his retirement in January 1913 his systolic blood pressure stood at 164.

But can this hypothesis bear the burden of all particulars?

Vascular dementia is 'uncommon' in persons less than 65 years of age (Alzheimer's Society, 2014). Deakin was dead at 63.

A diagnosis of vascular dementia sits also uneasily with the fact that his illness barely reduced his impulse—if not compulsion—to take up the pen and cover the page, even when his condition was well-established. If it had any effect, it was to reduce, on occasion, the control he exercised in passing the pen over the page.

Third, vascular dementia has a mean duration well below a decade.⁹ Deakin's illness lasted well above a decade. At the age of 56, he retreated from public life in the face of his illness. From the age of 52, at end of 1908, he was forgetting things he had just read. At 51, in September 1907, he was, in Hughes' contemporary judgement, 'a very sick man. Nervous breakdown' (quoted in La Nauze, 1965, p. 424). In A.B. Piddington's retrospective judgement, Deakin was already losing his mental grip on the occasion of his Notice to Quit speech to G.H. Reid of June 1905, when he had not yet turned 49. In 1901, the year of his 45th birthday, Deakin was 'frequently unwell' (Brett, 2017, p. 255) and stooped.

Similar doubts cloud, without eliminating, the suggestion that his illness was 'almost certainly Alzheimer's disease' (Headon, 2018). Alzheimer's will not often kill by the age of 63. But it may. It will generally not last longer than a decade; but, again, it may. However, Alzheimer's typically does damage skill in longhand, and there is no sign of that in Deakin.

Is there a more likely diagnosis?

This paper advances two hypotheses.

⁹ 'Some data suggest that those who develop dementia following a stroke survive three years, on average': www.alz.org/dementia/vascular-dementia-symptoms.asp.

Over the past 40 years, the increased sensitivity of diagnostic markers have revealed that vegetarians are at severe risk of vitamin B12 deficiency. The consequences include ‘irreversible neurological damage’ cognitive difficulties, memory loss, fatigue and loss of balance (Herrmann & Obeid, 2008). As the body is endowed with reserves of B12, a deficiency can take years to develop in the face of a vegetarian diet.

The significance of vitamin B12 deficiency is that Deakin was a strict vegetarian in young adulthood (Gabay, 1992, p. 11). He relaxed this regimen somewhat in his maturity.¹⁰ However, it is known that once a deficiency is established it is not remedied by simply switching to a non-vegetarian diet.

The second hypothesis is more sensational. It invokes, not the Emperor of all maladies, but their Lucifer, syphilis.

The hypothesised identification rests on the mental collapse (‘neurosyphilis’) that is often occasioned by syphilis in its ‘tertiary’, or concluding, stage.

‘His mind grew weak; his utterance became hesitating, for want of the right word to express its meaning; his gait tottering ...’ (Beaney, 1872, p. 204). Thus speaks one 19th-century report of a sufferer of neurosyphilis.

Granted: many illnesses can produce such symptoms of mental disarray. But the hypothesis of syphilis sheds an apparent gratuitousness on account of its shocking prevalence, by our standards, before the antibiotic revolution. Thus, the British Royal Commission into Venereal Disease of 1913 estimated, on the basis of results of Wasserman tests, that 8.3 per cent of the male upper- and middle-class residents of London in their mid-30s were infected (Szreter, 2014).¹¹ A substantial minority of these, say around a third, would eventually develop neurosyphilis, say about 2.75 per cent. A calamity.¹² Epidemiological considerations suggest that 19th-century Australia would not be more fortunate than London; rather less, in fact. The epidemiological predisposing factors for syphilis are considered to be: a booming economy, a port town and a population with a high ratio of men to women.¹³ The Melbourne of Deakin’s youth would have been a syphilitic inferno.

10 Meat at lunch remained a rarity in Deakin’s regimen (Rickard, 1996, p. 102).

11 Other attempts at measurement of the prevalence of syphilis in developed countries before antibiotics also produce a number in the region of 10 per cent (Zajdowicz, n.d.)

12 By comparison, the prevalence of vascular dementia in the 65–69 age group is broadly around 0.1 per cent (Dubois & Rejean, 2001). Other candidate causes of mental collapse are still rarer. Thus CADASIL—an ‘inherited form of vascular dementia ... caused by a mutation on the Notch 3 gene’, and proposed as the cause of the madness of Nietzsche and Ruskin—is ‘very rare’ (www.dementia.org.au/about-dementia/types-of-dementia/vascular-dementia).

13 The 1881 Victorian census records 123 men aged 21 and over for every 100 women so aged.

The toll of those stricken certainly includes J.F. Archibald.¹⁴ The exact coincidence of his years of his birth and death with Deakin's (1856–1919) bodes uneasily.¹⁵ The toll would also include Walter Richardson of 'Richard Mahony'; William Astley, Barton's press officer in the Federation campaign (Andrews, 1976, p. 166); and John Curtin's father (Day, 2006, p. 224). I strongly suggest the fatalities would extend to the spiritualist John Tyerman (1838–1880); the first registrar of Sydney University, Hugh Kennedy (1829–1882); and Melbourne law academic J.B. Gregory (1844–1910), the originator of the 'Gregory Fractional Transfer' in the Hare-Clarke system. One may easily extend the list of Australian noteworthies of the period whose death from 'insanity' or 'softening of the brain' before the age of 60 are grounds for a dismaying apprehension.

I have proposed; let medical expertise dispose.

5. Extraordinary seamen

Deakin's memoir of Federation (Deakin, 1944) includes his revelation of a remarkable escapade that he, the Victorian minister for defence and the Victorian Premier resolved upon in 1888 or 1889. The background was the friction between Britain and France over the New Hebrides; and Alfred Deakin's fixation on these islands. In November 1887, the two imperial powers had agreed to jointly assure the life and property of their respective subjects residing in the New Hebrides, but otherwise make no claim of sovereignty. And there the matter seemed to rest. But, says Deakin, rumours subsequently arose that French annexation was imminent:

It was therefore decided to forestall the French by dispatching a detachment of the Victorian permanent military forces in a swift steamer with orders to hoist the British flag and keep it flying (Deakin, 1944, p. 22).

To achieve requisite surprise, the forces were to covertly embark on a chartered boat while ostensibly on a training manoeuvre.

This foolhardy scheme appears to have remained completely uninvestigated by historians, and, apart from Murdoch, not even noticed.

¹⁴ I venture the account of Archibald's medical condition supplied by his biographer could not be interpreted otherwise. At times Archibald believed his condition was syphilitic (Lawson 1971, pp. 218–20).

¹⁵ As is the use of the phrase 'nervous breakdown' by Archibald's devotees to describe, and disguise, his collapse in 1906.

6. Who was the master?

Deakin's politics have been an object of contention of commentators, especially as to which contemporary political tendency may claim his legacy.

The defect with any concern to place Deakin on an ideological spectrum is that, for all his bibliomania, he was not a person of ideas; certainly not of systems of ideas. He was no theoriser.

Neither was Deakin a person of causes. Certainly not lost causes, as Brett notes. As Deakin conceded, scruples in doctrine soon departed him (Deakin, 1957). Winning causes, he favoured. Thus the stereotypical character of his various policy stances. It is hard to think of any that was not perfectly of his time and place.

Deakin, then, was one of the breed for whom policy is not an end, but a means. But a means to what? For Deakin it was the power, not the glory. Or to put the matter more precisely, mastery: mastery of séances, audiences, caucuses, chambers, cabinets. It was entirely characteristic to exult in 1909, 'I have become more than ever the pivot of the whole situation' (Murdoch, 1999, p. 263).

Deakin's quest for mastery might in turn be resolved into that distinct sense of superiority which he clearly suits himself in his memoirs, and which could lead him to compare himself on occasion with Jesus Christ (Rickard, 1996, p. 112). In a word, narcissism. Not to vanity; Deakin was proud, rather than vain. The plaudits of others had little value. He had no interest in prizes at school; and he had no interest in the prizes of adult life. Thus his remarkable refusal of an offer of knighthood from the British Prime Minister at the age of 30. To rebuff a knighthood was not actually rare; those who rejected knighthoods included Kingston, Playford, O'Connor and Pember Reeves. For all that, his refusal remains an impressive, almost breathtaking, act. But it was not done out of republicanism—which Deakin repudiated. And certainly not humility. Quite the opposite. For Deakin, he would be the one to confer any honours. The only crown he wanted was that which he would place on his own head. The only cross he would care for is the one he would nail himself to.

This conviction of superiority fostered a distance and an inner coldness that belied the appearance of Affable Alfred. In his adolescence—the age of camaraderie—Deakin had no friends amongst his peers. The adult friendships he later formed were not insincere, but they were largely epistolary; they were, literally, 'composed'. Unlike so many of his political peers, he was a member of no club.

This emotional distance in Deakin accommodated a ruthlessness, which extended treachery.¹⁶

16 Deakin bears a comparison with Lloyd George, not only in his ruthlessness, but also in his oratorical power over audiences; his immunity to flattery; and the fact that he lived 'the life of the extrovert and yet had the strength of the introvert's inner life' (Salter, 1947). Dare one also mention Welsh provenance! Always attracted to the martial, one wonders what if Deakin, like George, had been his country's warrior champion in the First World War?

Deakin's parliamentary career began and ended with betrayals of trust.

As a freshly elected member of the Victorian parliament, Deakin announced to an 'incredulous' House his resignation (Gabay, 1992). He had won his seat only on account of the particular preferment that Berry had awarded him. He had not advised Berry of his decision to resign, or anyone else. His patrons had no intimation of this act of desertion.

And his parliamentary career closed with him voting for Joseph Cook as leader of the Commonwealth Liberal Party, rather than his deputy Forrest, to Forrest's perplexed distress.

Mileposts in the journey between include his repudiation in 1905 of the Protectionists' compact with Reid, which not only stranded certain rivals, but left Turner 'stabbed in the back by one of his oldest friends' (McMinn, 1989, p. 225). The frenzy of indignation that Deakin's abandonment of Fisher produced in Lyne, a stable personality if there ever was one, bespeaks an acute psychic wound.

Ruthless as he was in the deployment of power, the question still remains: how successful was Deakin in winning it? One locus for the investigation of that query would be Deakin's relationship with Barton. It seems that Deakin was successful in manipulating the glory-hunting Barton to secure his own ends. Thus, Deakin successfully forbore on Barton to appoint Kingston to his cabinet. And what of the greatest prize: the post of prime minister, which Barton so conveniently vacated in 1903? 'Take PM' was Syme's advice to Deakin in this period. Which brings us Deakin and Syme. In this game of king and the royal favourite, who was truly the master?

The Ariel Mr Deakin

The six questions above are unresolved. This lack of resolution, however, does not, I believe, lend itself to the moniker of Deakin the Enigmatical that has become popular. It was Deakin who referred to himself as 'enigmatical'. Do any contemporaries refer to him this way? True: his cabinet minister Patrick Glynn records Deakin as a 'puzzle'. And there are puzzles about Deakin's life—as there are, presumably, with every figure. But even the outright contradictions that Deakin does present—his arrogance in the company of others, and his humility in the company of himself—does not to my mind make for an enigma. An 'enigma' is closer to an uncertainty as to *what* is going on, rather than *why* it is going on. It is G.H Reid who receives the judgement of enigmatical from both his contemporaries (Piddington, 1929; Lang, 1956) and later historians (Martin, 1980), and with justice.

I would rather dub Deakin a marvel than a mystery. We might think of an Ariel Mr Deakin. Deakin's Ariel in service of Swedenborg's Prospero. A Shakespearean fairy; not inhuman, but unearthly; entrancing by words, rather than notes; manipulative and mischievous; hastening to put his girdle 'round the Earth'—and simple mortals—in 40 minutes.

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This text is taken from *Agenda, Volume 25 – Number 1, 2018*,
edited by William Coleman, published 2018 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.