

Liberty, justice, duty:
a plain guide for everyday people.



The
AUSTRALIAN
CITIZEN

Walter Murdoch

This edition published 2026
by Living Book Press
Copyright © Living Book Press, 2026

ISBN: 978-1-76153-971-8 (hardcover)
978-1-76153-928-2 (softcover)

First published in 1912.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any other form or means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher or as provided by Australian law.



A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

The Australian Citizen

by

WALTER MURDOCH, M.A.

CONSIDER WHAT NATION IT IS
WHEREOF YE ARE AND WHEREOF
YE ARE THE GOVERNOURS.

— King James I, *Basilikon Doron* (1599)



A Note from the Publisher

This edition reproduces Walter Murdoch's *The Australian Citizen* (1912) in its original form. Readers will encounter language and ideas that reflect the assumptions, attitudes, and social theories of the early twentieth century. These include outdated racial terminology such as "savages" and "primitive peoples"; colonial viewpoints and harsh judgements about non-European cultures; and extended discussions of the "White Australia" policy—an idea widely taught at the time but one that no longer represents the values of modern Australia or of Living Book Press.

The book also describes social conditions—such as child labour, industrial exploitation, and the lack of legal protections for the vulnerable—that, while disturbing today, were part of the realities Murdoch sought to explain to young Australians of his era.

These elements have been preserved for historical accuracy. Presenting the text exactly as it was written helps readers understand what earlier generations were taught, how those ideas shaped society, and why many of them must now be firmly rejected. Reading such material invites reflection: it reminds us how far Australia has come, and how far we still have to go, in building a society that is genuinely equal, just, and free for all.

Contents

Introductory

1. LINKS.....	5
2. THE POLITICAL LINK.....	8
3. SOCIETY'S MACHINE	11
4. FREE WHEELS.....	13

Part 1 - Government

1. WHAT IS GOVERNMENT	16
2. DIFFERENT KINDS OF GOVERNMENT.....	21
3. LOCAL GOVERNMENT.....	24
4. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE.....	32
5. STATES AND COMMONWEALTH.....	39
6. THE COMMONWEALTH.....	43
7. COMMONWEALTH AND EMPIRE.....	47
8. THE BRITISH EMPIRE.....	51

Part 2 - The Role of Government

9. PUBLIC HEALTH.....	59
10. PUBLIC EDUCATION.....	68
11. PUBLIC ORDER.....	75
12. PREVENTION OF POVERTY.....	82
13. RELIEF OF POVERTY.....	89
14. PRODUCTION OF WEALTH.....	94
15. COMMUNICATIONS (the Post Office).....	100
16. COMMUNICATIONS (Railways).....	108
17. INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION.....	116
18. REGULATION OF WAGES.....	123
19. IMMIGRATION.....	128
20. DEFENCE.....	134
21. TAXATION	143

Part 3 - The Legislature

22. THE LEGISLATURE.....	155
23. THE LEGISLATURE (continued).....	162
24. THE EXECUTIVE.....	167
25. THE POWER OF PARLIAMENT.....	174
26. THE JUDICIARY.....	178

Part 4 - Citizenship

27. LIBERTY.....	185
28. LAW.....	192
29. EQUALITY.....	197
30. OUR DEBT TO SOCIETY.....	203
31. OUR DUTY TO SOCIETY.....	209

APPENDIX: Preferential Voting.....	214
------------------------------------	-----

PREFACE.

In order that the reader may not be more disappointed than is necessary, I think it right to explain that this little book was written, primarily, for use in schools; and that I have, throughout, assumed the co-operation of the intelligent teacher. The opening and the concluding portions of the book, especially, will, unless this is borne in mind, be criticised as too abstract and indefinite. Considerations of space have often compelled me to content myself with a broad generalization, leaving it to the teacher to look round—or, better still, to induce his pupils to look round—for concrete examples.

It is hoped that this school-book may possibly appeal to some who, though no longer at school, feel themselves to be beginners in the study of political science.

The book would have been more inadequate than it is, but for the valuable aid ungrudgingly given to the author by Mr. Frank Tate, I.S.O., and Mr. R. R. Garran, C.M.G., to both of whom I desire to express my gratitude. My indebtedness to the *Commonwealth Year Book*—which is one of the very best year books in the world—will be obvious to all readers.

For the benefit of those teachers who may wish to pursue the subject, I append a list of the shorter and more generally accessible of the books which I have myself found useful.

MacCunn.—*Ethics of Citizenship.*

Ritchie, D. G.—*Studies in Social and Political Ethics.*

Marriott.—*English Political Institutions.*

Seeley.—*Introduction to Political Science.*

Bryce.—*Hindrances to Good Citizenship.*

Low.—*The Governance of England.*

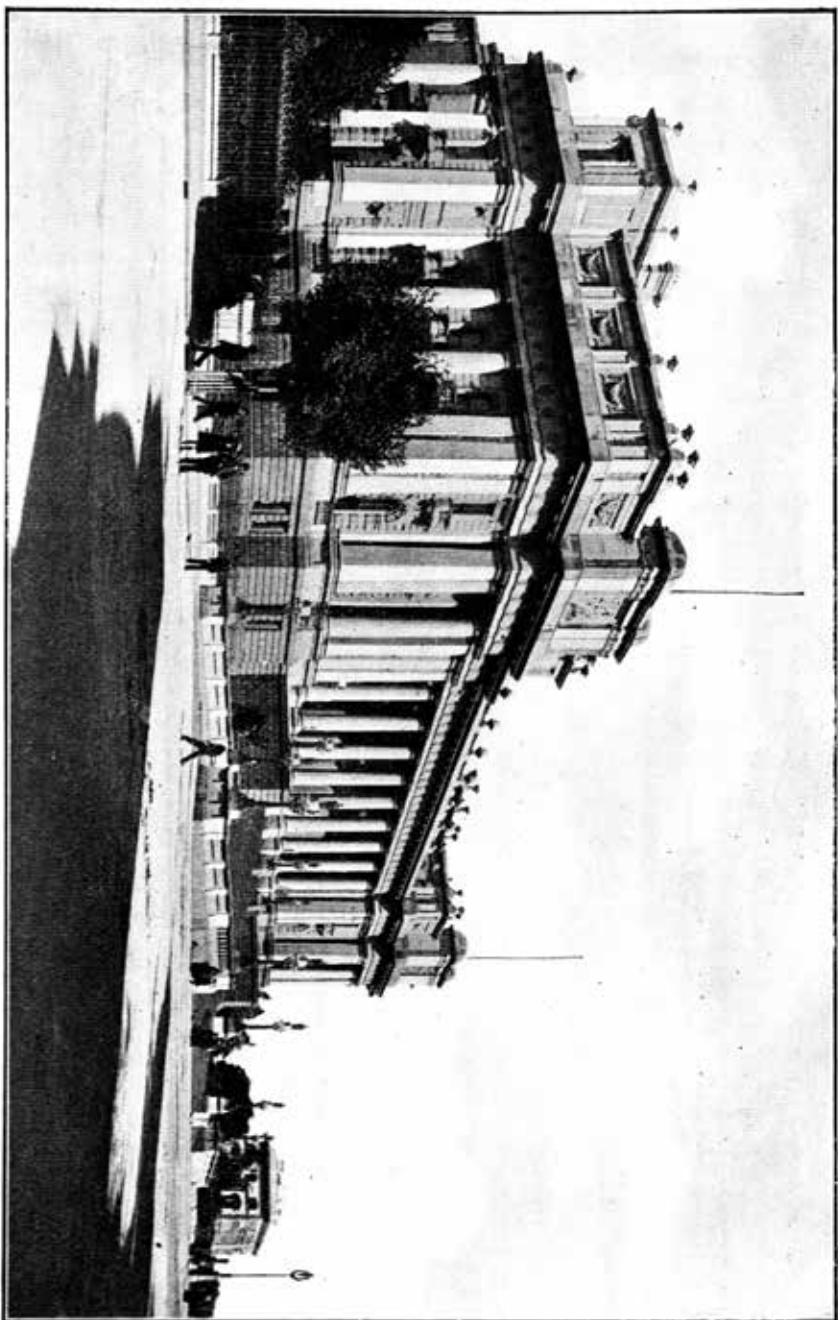
Harrison Moore.—*The Commonwealth of Australia.*

Maitland.—*Justice and Police.*

I should like to add that criticisms and suggestions from teachers will be received gratefully and considered attentively.

W. M

Melbourne. *March, 1912*



HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH

INTRODUCTORY

I.

LINKS

HUMAN beings are bound to one another by various links, which we call relationships. It would not be possible to make a complete list of these relationships, because there are too many of them. The relationship of parent and child, of husband and wife, of master and servant, of king and subject, of officer and private soldier, of employer and employee, of buyer and seller—these are but a few of the most important links which bind people to one another. The more civilized a nation is, the greater the number of links by which members of that nation are connected. The link, for example, which connects you and me at the present moment—the relationship of reader and writer—is one only known to peoples more or less civilized. But no people is so uncivilized that its members are not linked together in a number of ways. Now when we want to speak of human beings, not as separate individuals, but as connected with one another by links or relationships, we use the word “Society.”

If you could take to yourself the wings of the morning and fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, wherever you found human beings you would find them *associating* with each other—living together and working together. If you take the wings of history and travel back to the earliest times of which we have any knowledge, you will find the same thing: people living in groups. Every such group we call a society. And the impulse which drives men to associate, the sense of a need for human companionship and human help, we call

the social instinct. It is possible for a man to be separated from all society. There was no society on Robinson Crusoe's Island—until Friday appeared, when a society of two came into existence. But Crusoe was never separated from his own social instinct; and this it was which, more than anything else, made his solitude bitter.

People who live in a civilized country are very apt to forget the vast network of human relationships in which they live. Think for a moment of the number and variety of human beings with whom the clothes you are wearing connect you. Some of your garments are woollen; they link you with drovers, and boundary-riders, and shearers, and wool-brokers, and the men who built a factory, and the men who invented the machinery used in it, and the men who brought from the earth the iron of which that machinery is made, and cloth-merchants and tailors and a multitude of others. If some of your garments are made of cotton, that fact connects you with other parts of the world and with another army of workers. If you have any mother-of-pearl buttons, they link you to yet another army—of sailors and divers and merchants and factory-hands. The next time you sit down to dinner, think for a minute or two of the different kinds of labour, in different quarters of the world, which have gone to the preparation of food for you. You will find that a quite ordinary meal is a lesson in geography. It is also a lesson in human relationships.

Nobody, not even the most selfish of us, can possibly cut himself off from human relationships. Even the most selfish of our pleasures depend on the fact that there are other human beings. Take, for instance, the miser's pleasure in his hoard; when he counts his gold so lovingly, his delight is derived, not simply from the fact that he owns a number of coins, but from the fact that he owns more of them than other people. If he discovered that everyone else in the town had a little more money than he, all his delight would be gone—which shows that it had a reference to other people. A girl

who takes pride and pleasure in a pretty hat would be neither proud of it nor pleased with it if every other girl in the school appeared in precisely the same kind of hat. Even the most selfish of our enjoyments depend on the fact that we are social beings.

II.

THE POLITICAL LINK

Being by nature social, then, we naturally form societies. A society is a collection of people linked together by some lasting bond or bonds and pursuing some common purpose or purposes. A society may be small or large, simple or complex. A cricket-club is a society; and the British Empire is a society. We who are members of the British Empire are bound to one another by many and various links.

For instance, there is the link of race: the fact that many of us are members of the same race, are more or less distant kinsmen. You and I, if each of us knew his own family tree, would probably find, without going very far back, that we had a common ancestor. Then there is the link of language; it seems obvious that this must be one of the essential links of any society—the fact that its members are able to tell each other what they think and what they want. Then there is the link of religion, which has so powerful a binding force that at one time it seemed strong enough to bind all the nations of Europe in one great society, which was called Christendom; and to set men of different races and different tongues fighting side by side in the crusades. Again, there is the link of tradition: you and I have a common pride in thinking of Quebec and Plassey and Trafalgar and many another terrible and splendid day; we think of Pym and of Cromwell, of Chatham and of Burke, and rejoice together in the courage, wisdom, and strength of these heroes of our history. Again, our common heritage of custom is a powerful link; each of us has

been born into a world of customs—of ways of doing things. You did not invent the custom of shaking hands with a friend or of giving presents on a birthday; you found those customs, and thousands of others, awaiting you; and you accept and obey them without thinking. (If you will examine your life for twenty-four hours, you will be surprised to find how little of it is original and independent, and how much consists of just doing what, among people of British origin, it is customary to do.) And yet again, there is the link of ideas, and especially of moral ideas. You and I find ourselves in a world where certain kinds of conduct are thought to be right, and certain other kinds wrong. Multitudes of men are bound together by the fact that they agree, in the main, as to the way in which it is fitting for a human being to live; that they have pretty much the same way of looking at questions of right and wrong.

But if you look at these links, one by one, you will see that none of them can be *the* link binding together all members of the British Empire; indeed, each of them is more likely to bind us to some people outside the Empire than to certain of our fellow-members. For instance, the link of language binds us to the Americans of the United States, but not to the Dutch of South Africa. The link of race ought to bind us more closely to the inhabitants of Germany than to the French inhabitants of Canada; and so on. What then is the link which connects you and me as members of the British Empire, and which does not connect us with the members of any other society? It is to be found in the word *fellow-subjects*. If we are members of the British Empire, we are subjects of the same sovereign. But the meaning of this is not yet perfectly clear, because, as we shall see presently, the word sovereign may mean a king or queen, or it may mean a chosen body of persons, or it may mean the whole nation. It will be simpler, for the present, to say that we are citizens of the same great State.

But, you may say, surely this is just telling us the same thing

twice over; for *society* and *state* mean precisely the same thing. No: they do not mean the same thing. The state is a kind of machinery¹ which a society gradually constructs in order to protect its members from enemies outside and inside the society, and in order to help its members to lead the life which, according to the ideas of that society, is fittest for a human being to lead. In other words, the state is the means by which society tries to help every individual member to realise his highest possibilities—to lead the best life possible to him. The work of the state is to remove from every person's path the obstacles which would prevent him from living this best life; to secure certain essential conditions, without which this best life is for ever impossible to him.

Can we name these essential conditions? We can: their names are Liberty and Justice.

The business of the state, then, is to secure the utmost possible measure of liberty to all its members, and to maintain justice between one member and another. But it is obvious that the very first duty which society owes to its members is to preserve itself from destruction; to guard itself against attacks by an enemy. This duty, also, it performs by means of the machinery which we call the State.

The reason why society does these things for its members is, as you will see if you think for a minute or two, that it can do them infinitely better than its members could, each acting separately.

1 If this book had not been intended mainly for youthful readers, I should have made a distinction here. Government would have been spoken of as the machine, the State as society organised to use the machinery of government. But on the whole, I have thought the statement in the text less likely to be misunderstood.

III.

SOCIETY'S MACHINE

Man is sometimes distinguished as the tool-using animal; but some of the lower animals also use tools. Monkeys, for instance, will use stones and sticks as weapons—and weapons are one kind of tools. But man is the tool-*making* animal. The monkey uses a stone or a stick as he finds it lying about; he does not try to change it. It is only a man who will take the stone, grind it to a sharp edge, and lash the stick to it, so as to make an axe. So it is with that tool which we call *government*, or *the state*. Many of the lower animals have a kind of government. A herd of elephants, for instance, has its leader and its sentinels; so has a herd of buffaloes. The bees have a queen, a small class of idlers, and a large class of labourers with various duties allotted to them. But the form of government of an elephant herd does not change from century to century; the bees' commonwealth is the same today as it was when a Roman poet described it two thousand years ago. Human beings, on the other hand, have constantly changed and are constantly changing their form of government. There is a vast difference, is there not? between a primitive weapon, such as the stone axe I have spoken of, and a vast and complicated weapon such as a great modern battleship. Yet that difference is hardly so vast as the difference between the government of a primitive horde or clan and the government of a great modern people. The modern state is the greatest, the most complex, the most wonderful of all the machines that man has devised. When we open our eyes and look

at it, we see that this is so; but we very rarely do open our eyes and look at it. We are so accustomed to it that we take it for granted, as we take for granted the air we breathe and many another blessing.

How has this great and complicated machine come to be what it is? You sometimes hear it spoken of as if it had simply grown like a tree, gradually, silently, and without effort of its own. But the state did not grow like a tree into its present form, any more than the stone axe grew like a tree until it became a battleship. It was made into what it is by conscious effort—by the efforts of many generations of men. Changes have continually taken place; parts of the machine that worked badly have been removed, and better parts have been put in their place; ingenious devices have been adopted; a safety-valve has been added here, and there a piston has been lengthened; gradually the machine has been made to do more and more work, and to do it better. But every change has first been an idea in the mind of a thinking man, and has been turned into reality by the painful efforts of men. All the liberty we enjoy, the peace, the safety, the comfort, the well-being which our form of government secures for us—all has been won for us by the efforts of those who went before us, and in some cases by their agony and blood. They fought and died to hand down to us what we accept almost without noticing it. And it is only by our own effort that this machine can be kept running smoothly and doing its work well; it is only by our own effort that it can be improved, so that it may do its work better.

It was not made with the mountains; it is not one with the deep.

Men, not gods, devised it. Men, not gods, must keep.

IV.

FREE WHEELS

Though it may seem desirable to use the word “machinery” in describing the state, we must remember that it is very different from any other machine. It is a machine guided and controlled and driven by its own parts. It is a machine, each of whose parts is made of flesh and blood, and moved by hopes and fears and by various and innumerable desires. Most wonderful of all, it is a machine whose every part has a will of its own, and is free to choose between working well and working badly.

The parts of this great political machine are called citizens. You and I are citizens whether we like it or not. It will not do to say that we prefer to be private individuals, and will leave others to be citizens if they like. “Citizen” is simply the name we give to a human being when we think of the political side of him; you may say that you have no political side, but it would be just as sensible to say that you have no left side. Man is by nature, as a great Greek philosopher said, a political animal: you may determine not to be political, but it would be just as sensible to determine not to be an animal. No; we are wheels in the great machine, whether we like it or not,—but we are free wheels: free to choose between doing our work well and doing it badly. We are citizens, and we cannot help being citizens; all that is left for us to choose is whether we will be good or bad citizens.

The first duty of a citizen is to try to understand the machinery of which he is a part; for it is another curious thing about this

extraordinary machine, that it will never work really well until its parts understand what they are doing. In this little book I shall try to give, in the simplest language I can find, an account of the institutions in the midst of which, and by means of which, you and I must play our parts as citizens.

PART I.
GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS GOVERNMENT

If you have ever watched little boys playing marbles in a school playground, you must have noticed that the game was constantly interrupted by short but heated disputes. And if, being something of a philosopher, you have asked yourself why so simple a thing as a game of marbles should cause a succession of little quarrels, you have probably discovered that these quarrels arise from two sources: they are either disputes about the rules of the game, or disputes about whether this or that player has broken the rules. In a cricket or football match there is, as a general thing, no quarrelling; that is because, in the first place, the players know the rules very well, and do not disobey them; and because, in the second place, there is an umpire to *apply the rules* to individual cases. In cricket, for instance, he will say whether this or that batsman is out or not; in football, he will decide whether this or that player has held the ball too long; and so on. No well-conducted player ever thinks of questioning the umpire's authority.

We cannot imagine any game being played without rules, or without obedience to the rules on the part of the players. Now life is a much more complicated thing than any game; and it requires a far greater number of rules. And life offers people severe temptations to break the rules; a strong force is therefore required to prevent the rules from being disobeyed.

It is a fact, unfortunately, that all human relationships give

occasion for quarrelling, because all of them give occasion for injustice. If you will look at the examples of relationships which I gave on the first page, you will see that this is so. The parent may treat his child unjustly; the king may treat his subject unjustly; the employer may treat his employee unjustly; the officer may treat the private soldier unjustly; and so with all the rest. And therefore it is necessary to have rules governing all these relationships; otherwise there would be constant quarrelling all round us. And a society in which there is constant quarrelling is in a very bad state; firstly, because there can be no peace or comfort or real liberty for the members of such a society; and, secondly, because a society torn asunder by quarrels cannot present a strong, united front to an enemy,—it will fall before the next foe that comes against it. That, then, is the first reason why *government* is necessary: that *order* may be maintained,—order, which protects a society against attacks from outside, and which is necessary to the well-being of every member of the society. To maintain order, *rules* are necessary; and so government means, for one thing, the making of rules—or *laws*. The making of laws we call “legislation.”

But rules are of no use unless they are obeyed. In cricket there is an umpire, to apply the rules; and in the larger life of society we need an umpire constantly. When two people quarrel, who is going to say which is in the right? When a man is accused of having broken the law, who is going to say whether he has really broken the law? And, if he has, who is going to decide what punishment he deserves? This, also, is a part of government: to apply the laws to particular cases; to judge between man and man, and to judge between men and the laws. Government does this by means of its law-courts, which will be described later on.

Then, obviously, when the judges say that a man has broken a certain law and deserves a certain punishment, he must be punished; and who is to punish him? This, again, is one of the duties

of government; it is a part of the public work which government must perform. If it did not punish people for breaking the laws, it might as well not make laws at all.

But government must do a great deal of other public works besides punishing. This brings us to another reason, besides the maintaining of order, why government is necessary. There are many things which a society as a whole can do, which could not be done nearly so well, if they could be done at all, by private members of society acting separately. Take, for instance, the work of keeping the society ready, in time of peace, for an attack by an enemy; or the work of conducting a war. It is vitally necessary to every one of us that Australia should be properly defended; but no one of us, acting separately and as a private individual, could do anything to keep an enemy out of Australia. This is what we call *public work*: society, as a whole, must do this work; and it does it by means of government. Or, in other words, the State does it. Another example of public work is the carrying of letters all over the country; another is the education of the young. It is true that government often does work which private individuals *could* manage to do; for instance, the railways, which in Australia are thought of as public work, and managed by the government, are in other countries (Britain for example) managed by private individuals, who form themselves into little companies for the purpose. But this only means that the managing of railways is not *necessarily* public work; it is not a *necessary part* of the work of government. But defence, and the punishment of offenders against the law, are necessarily public work, and could not be done except by the State.

Now I must ask you to remember three long words. We have seen that government consists of three different kinds of work: the making of laws, the applying of the laws to particular cases, and the doing of public work. And these three tasks require three

different bodies of men to carry them out. The body which makes the laws is called the *legislature*. The body which applies the laws to particular cases is called the *judiciary*. And the body which does the public work is called the *executive*. (Only, as a matter of fact, certain members of the executive may be—and in Australia, and in Britain, always are—members of the legislature too.) These three—legislature, judiciary, executive,—may be called the three *organs of government*.

At this point you will be inclined to say—It seems, then, that government must be the great enemy to liberty; for government means, among other things, making laws, and insisting on our obedience to the laws; and laws are simply restraints on liberty. Liberty, you will say, means being able to do exactly as we please; and a law is just a way of stopping people from doing exactly as they please. So that government seems to be another name for interference with our personal liberty.

If so, savages must have much more liberty than we have, who are members of a civilized society. For in a civilized society, as we have seen, relationships are far more numerous and complicated than amongst savages; and so the government of a civilized society is a far greater and more complicated thing than the government of a savage tribe. But if you have ever read anything about the ways of a savage tribe, you know that the savage, far from having more liberty than you have, has infinitely less: he is, compared with you, an absolute slave. He is a slave to his chief; and he is a slave to the customs of his tribe. Indeed, if I had space for it... I could show you that the very idea of personal liberty does not occur to a primitive people; it only enters into men's minds when they are more or less civilized. So that government does not seem, after all, to be the enemy of liberty; it seems to be actually the best friend liberty has. In a later chapter, after we have looked a little at the machinery of government, I shall try to show you