

# Alfred Deakin

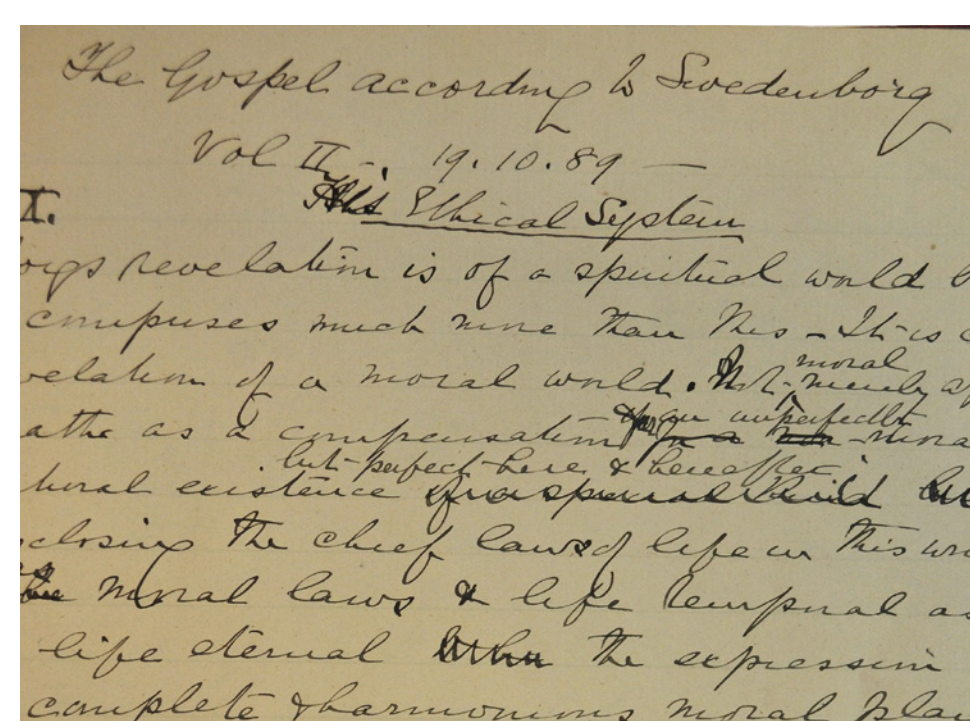
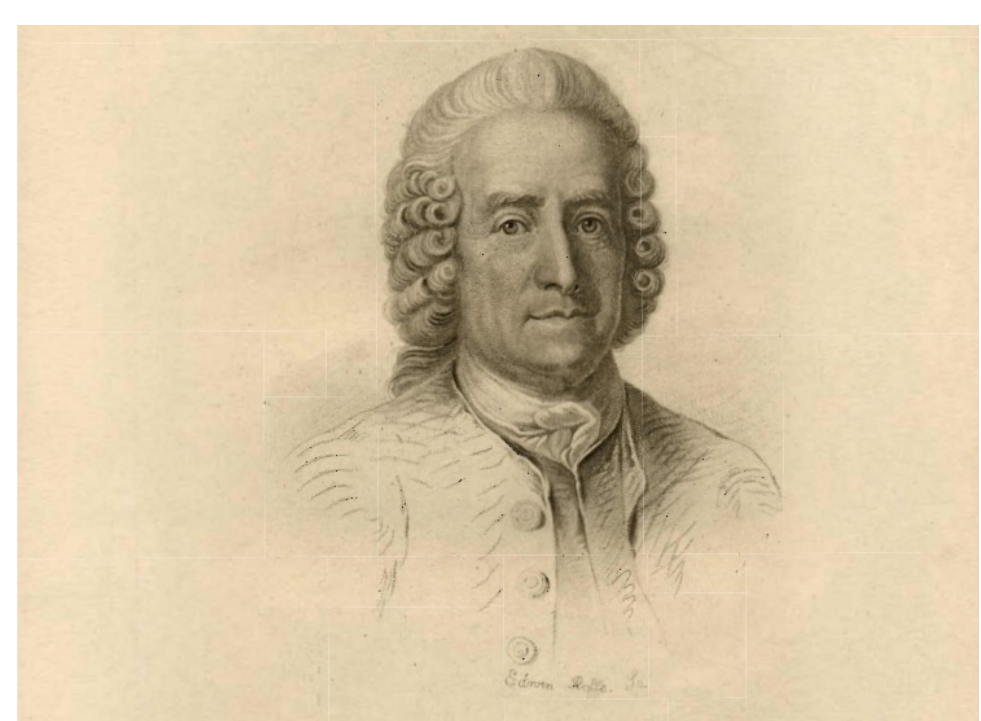
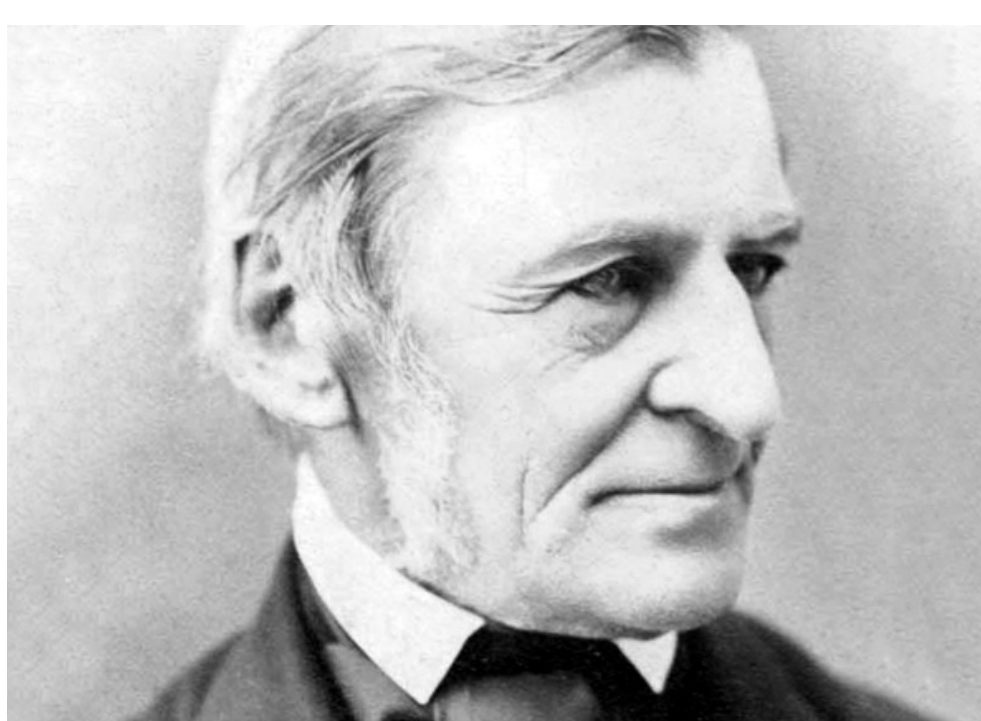
(1856–1919)

Australia's 2nd Prime Minister



## Terms of office

24 September 1903 to 27 April 1904 • 5 July 1905 to 13 November 1908 • 2 June 1909 to 29 April 1910



## A rich life of the spirit begins

During his university years (1872–78), the precocious Deakin began his own personal quest to discover the meaning of life and God, a journey that first led him into spiritualism and, later, Swedenborgianism. In its popular form, spiritualism started in 1848 with the widely reported 'Hydesville rappings' in New York state when two girls purportedly heard strange knocking sounds in their family home. The case was an immediate sensation and the girls became celebrities. Their seances attracted some of the most respected cultural figures in America and the world. Spiritualism connected closely to the writings of eighteenth-century Swedish mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, who had sought to prove the existence of the soul and the afterlife through the application of 'scientific' rigour.

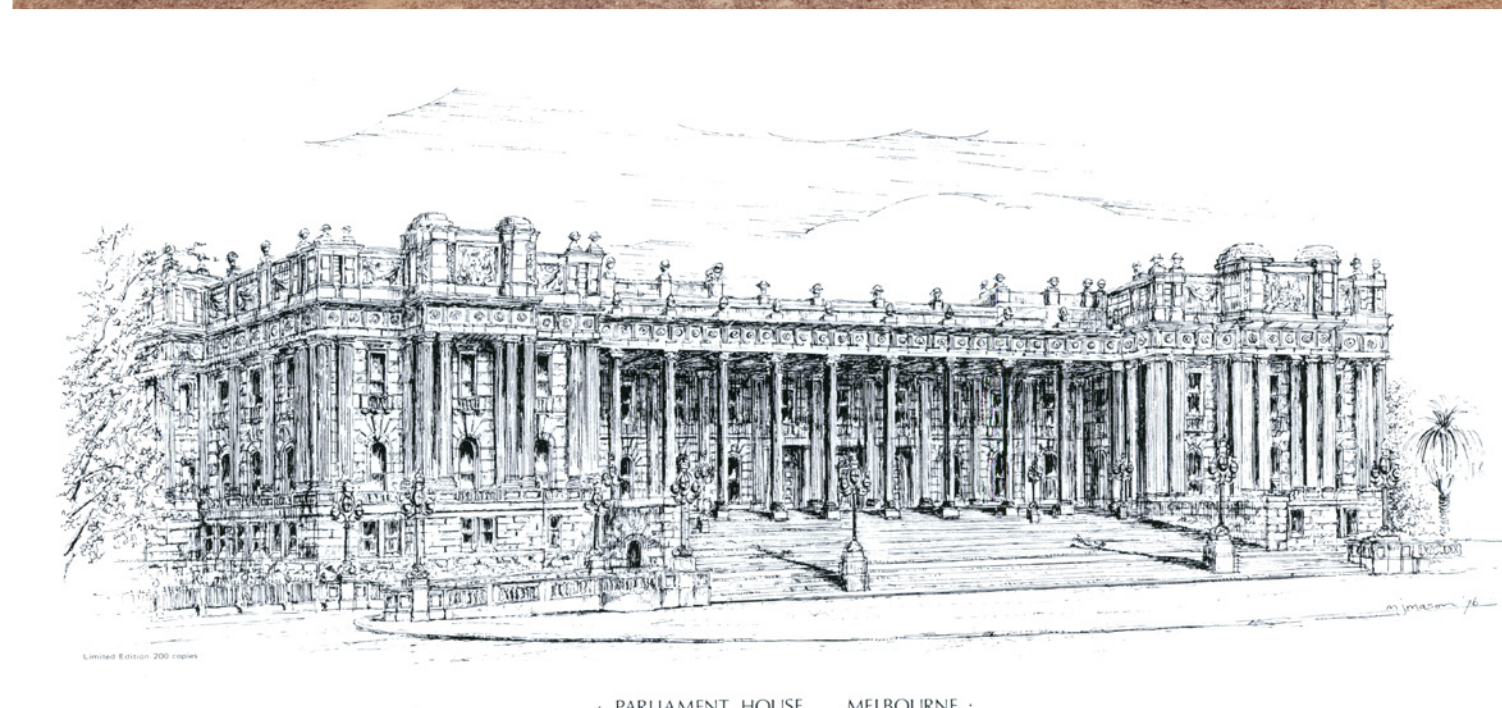
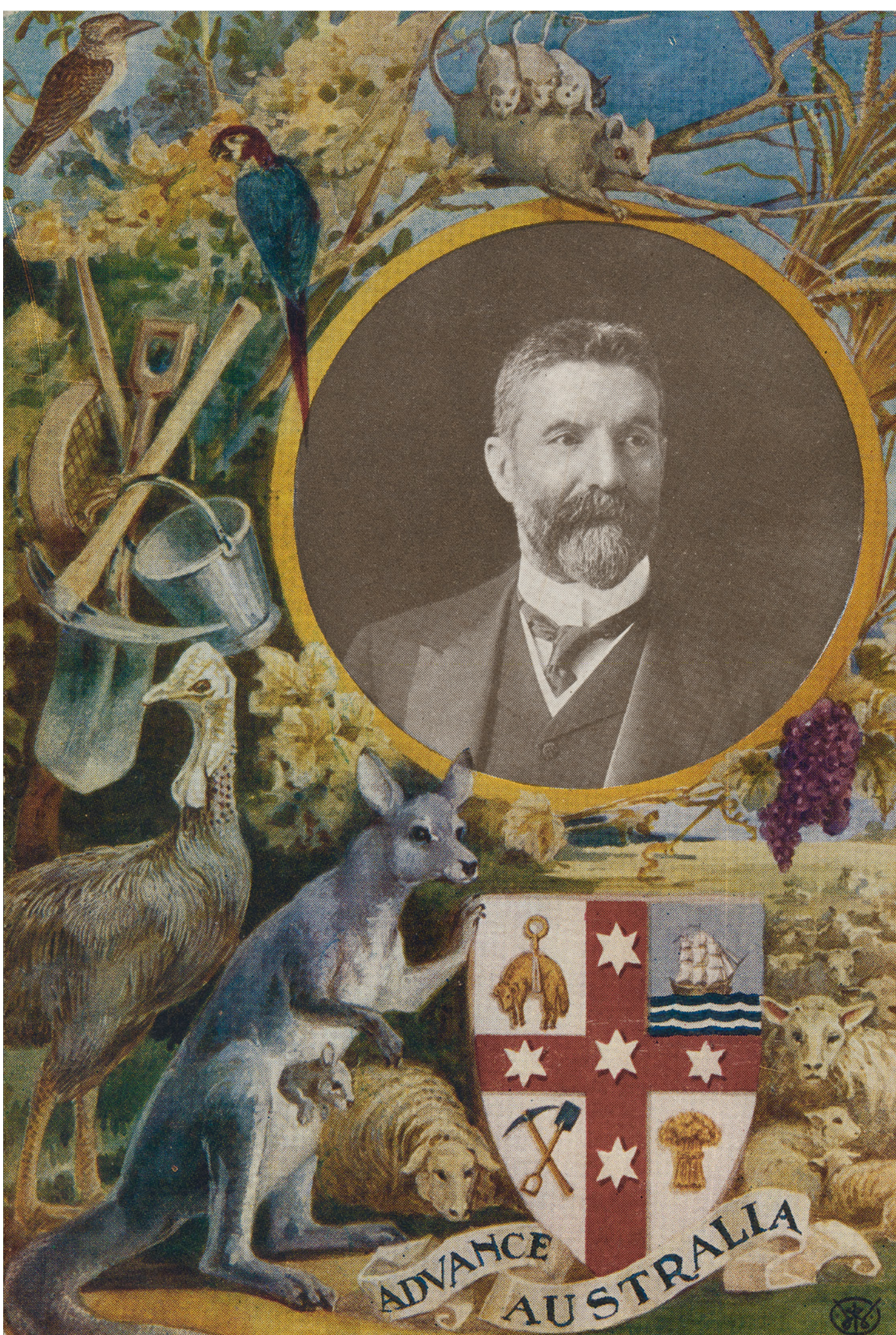
In a Western world still coming to grips with the implications of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859), many people with liberal beliefs began looking for meaning in their lives outside of traditional Christian modes—including a surprising number of the citizens of 'Marvellous Melbourne'. In his later teens, Deakin assumed a leading role in the fashionable spiritualist movement. He attended and initiated many seances, became a member of the newly established Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists (VAPS) in 1874, taught at its spiritualist Sunday School, the Progressive Lyceum, and edited the *Lyceum Leader* in 1877, a collection of spiritually elevated prose and verse. In 1878, the 22-year old Deakin became VAPS President; by then, he was vegetarian and a temperance advocate.

Deakin's spiritualist experiences in the 1870s had lifelong consequences. Habits formed in those years took hold as he began to balance the breadth of his reading and the intellectual rigour of his discussions with the urge to put his own thoughts on paper. Over the next several decades as his political career soared, this extraordinary, lone commitment produced a massive volume of private writing.

The recorded workings of his 'inner' life include a number of short plays, a five-act play entitled *Quentin Massys, a Drama*, an ambitious treatise on 'Poets and Poetry' (1,000 foolscap pages!), six dense 'Gospels', 'Insights', 'Impromptus', 'Sparks', 'Clues', 'Personal Equations', 'Praises, Phrases and Crazes', and countless prayers and poems.

Deakin even had a youthful flirtation as a 'spiritualistic medium' that produced a curious tome of 260 pages entitled *A New Pilgrim's Progress, purporting to be given by John Bunyan through an impressional writing medium*. In 1877, however, the same year that *A New Pilgrim's Progress* was published, Deakin made the decision to take no further active part in mediumship. There is 'nothing Bunyanesque in the book', he recanted, 'except the title'.

The dreamer was about to reveal a tough, pragmatic side.



## Sources

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