

OPENING CEREMONY OF KEYSBOROUGH SCHOOL, HAILEYBURY
COLLEGE, MELBOURNE, ON 26TH FEBRUARY, 1963.

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

Mr. Chairman, Moderator and Ladies and Gentlemen - and for that matter - boys and a few girls :

I have two tasks this afternoon. One is to declare this school open and the other is to unveil a plaque which will commemorate the celebrated and generous name of Weatherly.

I have been reminded this afternoon that I turned up in 1939, when I didn't have a grandchild, to open a new building at the South Road school. This is a long time ago, and on that occasion, I was able to mention the names of two great friends of mine, each of them most celebrated old boys of Haileybury - the late Sir Allan Newton, one of the great surgeons of the world and the late Sir Milfred Fullagar, one of the great lawyers of the world. And I mentioned them then because I am a great believer in tradition, I am a great believer in the history of the school being stuffed with names of people who have contributed something to the world. And therefore, Sir, it was with very great pleasure that I agreed on a date which I hoped was not too inconvenient to you to come here and to take part in the opening of this new school.

And the occasion is all the more significant because we have here today the Moderator of the Church of Scotland. You know, I have sometimes thought, Sir, in my idle moments that it is not a bad thing to be Prime Minister of Australia, so long as you don't stay there too long (Laughter) but it is an even better thing to be a Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and we are delighted to have you here; because whenever I think about these matters, I think of the great fact in Scottish history that education has been the great achievement and the great objective in Scotland.

I have had some interesting experiences in that country. I remember one which I recalled on a former occasion in another place and that was when I was staying with a man in Scotland - my wife and I were both there - and I walked out one morning into a field and I spoke with the man who was looking after the cows - he was the cowman on this property. You don't expect a cowman to discuss philosophy with you, do you? He is usually a somewhat more earthy character than that. This man walked across, leaned against a fence with me. Did he discuss the weather? Did he discuss the cricket? Did he discuss any of these things? Not at all. Within ten minutes, he was deep into philosophical discourse. At the end of half an hour, Sir, I blush to say, he had almost left me for dead. And I thought, where could this happen, except in Scotland and within the Scottish tradition and this school stands in the Scottish tradition. The church and the school. The fine tradition which makes parents feel that their children must have an even better chance than they had, that their children must go to a good school, that their children must go to a school in an atmosphere in which the human is not so absorbing as to obscure the divine. This is a magnificent tradition and that's why Haileybury has, particularly in recent years, grown so much and become so increasingly important among the schools of Victoria.

Now I just want, in addition to that, to say that I would like to get off my chest a little thing that is always there about schools and about learning in the broad. Our great temptation today, and this is a temptation that comes to many, many parents, is to say, "Let the boy or let the girl receive enough education to hold down a decent job." You know, that's not good enough. Not good enough. I am an unmitigated believer in what people call useless learning. How many times I have heard people say, "Oh, well, my son isn't going to be an engineer, so why should he worry about mathematics." Now, I am the last man to say that mathematics represents an agreeable study. I didn't ever find it such, but I am sure it was good for me to have to do it. "My son is not going to go on to the stage, why should he have to learn a lot of poetry by heart? How much better an accountant will this make him?" or "My son, he's not going into Parliament or into any of those occupations which require people to make speeches, why should he worry about speech? Why shouldn't he just get along with the gobbledygook that you hear so frequently from people? Why be different from others? Why speak properly when it is fashionable not to?" Now, I just want to answer these questions very, very briefly for the benefit of my fellow students who are here and also for the benefit of the parents.

A very great British soldier in the last war named Wavell - Wavell was the Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, a soldier of immense repute and of long experience and of great courage - his conversational powers were practically zero. This is a very remarkable thing. I am talking of a man I knew. To have a conversation with the great Wavell was the most difficult thing in the world but when he put pen to paper, then you get the whole wealth of his mind from the splendid prose of his "Life of Allenby" to the very colloquial cables that he used to send to Winston from time to time which you won't find in Winston's memoirs. (Laughter) And yet, in the course of the war, in the course of a period of time in which Wavell, outnumbered in the Middle East, had to resort to infinite stratagem in order to hold the position of the Allies in the Middle East, he wrote out an anthology of poetry and it contained only those he knew by heart - "Other Men's Flowers". I hope some of you, many of you, have seen it. A good octavo volume. Now, what do you think of that? Had poetry been useless to him? I will undertake to say that in the many periods of anguish that must have come to him at that time, the recollection in tranquillity of the verse he knew must have given him great comfort and great strength. Never ignore this kind of thing.

And the other matter I want to mention is the matter of speech. I don't mean just pouring out a lot of words because, between you and me, anybody can do that. I mean good speech, the best speech that you can attain. Don't neglect it. In this modern period of time, the capacity to communicate ideas is only less important than the capacity to evolve them. All the great scientists, all the great men of ideas would lose half their function in the world if they hadn't learnt to express themselves clearly and persuasively.

Not very far away from here is a new University carrying the name of Sir John Monash. Now, Sir John Monash was, by common consent, a very great soldier and a very great engineer and, incidentally, a very distinguished expert witness on scientific matters, so expert that a celebrated judge in Victoria once said that any solicitor who failed to retain Monash as an

expert witness was liable to be cast in damages for negligence. Now there you are. But he had a faculty not so well known to most people - one that I happened to be familiar with myself - the faculty of putting a case so simply, so persuasively, that even though you began by thinking he might be wrong, you ended up by being perfectly certain that he was right. And one of the reasons why he was a great soldier was that he had this power of exposition which took him almost to the ultimate top in the first World War. He knew what he wanted, he knew how to explain it. There's speech for you. Don't ignore these things. Don't go through life saying something a little incoherent and lazy and then say, "Well, you know what I mean." It is not really good enough. And don't go through life, looking at other people and saying, "Poetry! Ugh! I never read it," as if that were something to be proud of. Because you won't express yourselves in anything when you grow up and take on some task in life unless you have enriched your vocabulary and you enrich it by reading, by reading and by remembering.

Now, Sir, I am sorry to have got this little homily off my chest, as you might say, but really, this is perhaps an occasion for it, because I am not anticipating that this school is going to be just another school. I am anticipating that this is going to be more and more a great school and a famous school, the kind of school in which a generation of boys in fifty years' time - a hundred years' time - will be able to say honestly, "Let us now praise famous men and our fathers which begat us"; our fathers in this school and our grandfathers in this school remembered and remembered with honour and praise.

Sir, it's a very great honour and privilege for me to declare this school open.
