

CEREMONY AT ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS,
EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND, ON 28TH
JUNE, 1963

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

The fellow who lives my kind of life, Sir, moves along in a kind of rake's progress. I'm invited to come here - I'm greatly honoured - I'm told that I will, in effect, take an oath to be a law-abiding citizen - not for the first time. Then when I say, "This, of course, will be a highly agreeable occasion with no speeches", the answer is, "Well, we would like you to say a few words." A few words. This is the most masterly understatement of the century and whenever I am told "a few words", I know that I am for it. You have discovered that too, haven't you. Yes. "You're for it." And, really, I felt that I was entitled to some kind of revenge because when we went in to the ceremony, never has any politician stood so straight and so silent (Laughter) as I did for so long. (Laughter) Then instead of giving me a chair because if you give me a chair to sit on, I can write an almost legible signature - almost - but when I have to stand up and do it, it is indecipherable (Laughter) And so here I am, not knowing whether I am to be penalised or take my revenge, but I won't take my revenge for too long.

I was very amused - well, "amused" is not the right word, Sir - interested, when you were reading the long statement to which I have by implication attached myself, because I listened to it and I thought, "Well, now, this is all a matter of protecting the interests of the College of Physicians and its members." My Public Orator - where is he now? - Oh yes, there we are - he produced one of the whimsies of the century when he said that there was a long and friendly association between the doctors and the lawyers. (Laughter) This, I am bound to say, I have never previously observed, (Laughter) because in my respectable days at the Bar when I was doing a lot of work, I appeared in a considerable number of medical cases.

Well, I am happy to say that by luck I usually appeared for the doctor (Laughter) and that is a pretty difficult job because civil juries, presented by a child with a twisted arm or a man with a hole in the side of his face, will always say, "Oh, yes. Yes" - This is what they call, loosely, British justice, you see. They say, "Oh, isn't that terrible. How would you like that to happen to you. They tell me these doctors have a defence fund." (Laughter) And so if you whip the damages down by a £1,000 or £1,500, you are doing rather well.

But I thought I observed at that time that there was a sort of occupational friction between Counsel and medical witnesses, and I think there was something in it. I gave it a lot of thought at the time. I used to confer with my medical witnesses and give them fatherly advice - or brotherly advice -- at that time of my life, filial advice - as to, you know, what to beware of, how to play this game. But I think I learned one of the truths at that time and I pass it on to you for what it is worth.

A medical man is going to be called in a medical case. He is a doctor being sued for negligence and all the sentimental stuff piles up one end and there are medical witnesses to be called and they are eminent men, and like all eminent men, they have long since risen superior to the alphabet or the elementary textbook because they have gone beyond it, they've

moved on to a different level. This is true of all of us who practise a profession. You become so concentrated on what you might call the upper reaches of the business that you almost forget the elementary things that you learned years ago. And of course the cross-examiner, like me, who knows nothing whatever in reality about anatomy or physiology or whatever it may be, says to the instructor, "What's the leading text-book on this? It's a case on the elbow joint." (Jones on Joints, I think, used to be the thing) "What is the last edition?" And you get that and you wrap towels around your head. My wife can remember me doing this kind of thing. And you swot up the text book and then you cross-examine some distinguished fellow who knows far more about it than you will ever know, and you get him to commit himself to a proposition, and then you say in that smart fashion that characterises a cross-examiner in a case of this kind, "Do tell me, is Jones on Joints a recognised textbook?" "Yes" "What would the last edition be? Would the 15th?" (or whatever it might be) "Yes" "Now, I wonder if you would mind taking this, witness, at page 657 and reading out to the jury what it says," after he has committed himself to the opposite proposition. (Laughter)

Well, this you may say is indecent and although I used to think it great fun, I am free to admit that looking back on it, it was a rather shameful proceeding. But then I blame the medical witness who ought never to assume that Counsel is a fool and won't know the techniques of his own trade and practise them.

So when I heard you say, Orator, this morning that there was an old and friendly association, I was very grateful. It seemed to me to argue on the part of the medical profession a quality of compassion and forgiveness which I think is completely remarkable. (Laughter) And the best proof of that, of course, is that, as you have pointed out to me, I am a physician in Australia and I am a physician here.

Do you mind if I give you a little boastful remark, Sir? I mentioned it because I am still rattled by it. I am a gynaecologist and obstetrician (Laughter) of the Royal College (Laughter) though when they gave me a searching look they were not clear whether I appeared as a practitioner or as a patient. (Laughter) I am a Doctor of Science in some university somewhere, I am an architect - in fact, I have been given, except in the law about which I do know something, I have been given honorary degrees and honorary fellowships which have been cunningly devised to relate to the things of which I am most ignorant. (Laughter) This, I think, is very satisfactory.

But at the same time, Sir, I would like to recall the fact that I was able once to do the medical profession in my own country some small service. I was sitting in Opposition - I was Leader of the Opposition in about 1948 when this happened - when an amendment to the Constitution was being promoted by the then Government to give the Commonwealth Parliament power over medical health services, among other things. This had become necessary because a doubt had been exposed by the High Court and, of course, in a Federal system, you know, the limitations of power are constantly the subject of dispute in the courts. We, in Opposition, felt that the Commonwealth ought to have power to provide medical health and pharmaceutical benefits and things of this kind, but there was some anxiety in the medical profession as to whether this would enable the Government, which was a socialist government, to institute the

system of nationalised medicine. This was a very real apprehension and my little contribution to history is that for the first and only time in the history of the Commonwealth Parliament in Australia, the Leader of the Opposition got an amendment accepted to a constitutional bill and my amendment was to include in brackets "but not so as to include any form of civil conscription" which blew out all the prospect of a nationalised medical health service.

It turned out later on that that was what it did because there was a challenge in the High Court on some bill that had been introduced, and the High Court upheld the effect of this amendment. I'm not quoting the words with precision, but it did prevent the creation in Australia - and does it permanently - of what you might call a completely nationalised medical health service. Now that doesn't mean that you can't have a government medical service. We have one. I think we have a remarkably good one in Australia, but it is all based on the voluntary principle, on the basis of insurance, with private effort and with Government subsidy and backing, but it leaves completely untouched the choice of the patient. The doctor-patient relationship remains free, inviolate, but when the treatment has occurred between the doctor of choice and the patient who has gone to him, then the payments that are made are adjusted ultimately through some insurance scheme like the Hospital Benefits Association. I have forgotten what the total is but by and large you can take it that about 90 per cent. of the fee in a normal case comes from one or other of those two sources. But the free choice of doctor by the patient remains and, if I may say so, we think this is not too bad and we think that this is increasingly known in other countries and approved of, perhaps envied in other countries.

But I do simply say this, that I am most happy to have an obligation to defend the interests of the College and its members because I believe that in the new world, the world that we are living in, the function of the medical man is increasingly important, increasingly difficult. He is called upon for a most complex body of new knowledge, new techniques and new expertise in this world, but I believe that it is essential that the therapy of the individual confidence in the man should not be lost because I am sure that it is of tremendous importance and I am sure that you believe it too.

Now, Sir, the only other thing I want to say to you, because I am really not making a speech but merely offering a few words, is that I have been a bit taken aback by discovering that there is an argument about how my name should be produced. (Laughter) It turns out that the Aberdonians say "Menzie's" though I must say that the Lord Lyon this morning seemed to me to take a rather insistent view that it was "Mingie's" (Laughter) and in Edinburgh they say "Mingie's" and in those parts of Glasgow which have been adversely affected by the Irish, they call it "Menzie's". So who is to know? All I can tell you is what I said - was it to you, Sir? - this morning that at one of these big Dinners in London where there is a red-coated Master of Ceremonies and where I, myself - heaven help me - have made many speeches to patriotic gatherings of 800 people and 1,000 people and that sort of thing -- this old boy who runs through the name of the man he's announcing to the last flourish of "Justice of the Peace" - you know - wonderful business - having introduced me about four times, nipped across to me this time and said - and he had always delivered this in a Home Counties accent which was impeccable - he came across to me and said, "Exclude me, Sir, but an I to

introduce ye as 'Menzies' or by ye're proper name?" (Laughter)
And I said, "By my proper name, by all means," and so out it came
with a fine Doric quality, Home Counties entirely forgotten.

The only other thing I want to say to you on this
fascinating question of my name is that in England, I think,
more than in Scotland, the pronunciation of names and of place
names is calculated cunningly and wickedly to put the visitor
at a disadvantage. (Laughter) It is. I mean, people say,
"Well, I visited" and they pause, and they say, "I
visited Beaulieu," only to be told it is "Bewley". Well this
is very difficult. It is like Cirencester - "Cissister".
Chichester which is called "Chychester" in Australia. This
is all very difficult.

Many years ago I found myself appearing in the
Judicial Committee in a case which involved a patent of some
novelty and the name of the case was Paper Sacks Ltd. versus
Cowper, who was an eminently respectable solicitor in Sydney
and a great friend of mine; but he was on the other side.
His name had been given to this case for some reason of a
technical kind, and so it was Paper Sacks versus Cowper in
Australia and versus "Cooper" before the Judicial Committee.
One of my opponents in the case was a Sydney Counsel who
discovered not only that Cowper had become "Cooper" by crossing
the ocean but that Menzies had become "Mingies" in the course
of the same voyage, because the Judicial Committee had none
of your hesitation - they said "Mingies," you see. And so
this fellow from Sydney wrote some verse - I'll just quote it
to you. It has always stuck in my mind. It was rather nice; it
was a nice double rhyming scheme. When I have given it to you
I will conclude. It said :

Said Menzies to Cooper
I swear like a trooper
To be classed so it seems
With the Chunleys (Cholmondoleys)
and Weems (Wemyss)

Said Cowper to Mingies
Look here, Bob, the thing is
To alter our names
To Tompkins and James.

All you have to do is to remember that simple quartet, you see,
and all these things will be solved.

Well, now, I mustn't resume my seat as they say in
Parliament without telling you that you have given infinite
pleasure today to three people - my wife, myself and my eldest
son who is here for the first time and to whom this experience
will be unforgettable, and our joy is added to by the fact that
we are in Edinburgh and the joy is further added to by the fact
that we are among our friends and if I may say so, further added
to by the fact that we are in a street and in a building and in
a city in which, from time to time, you can see the work of the
greatest architect of our age, or any age, Robert Adam. I hope
I may say that in Edinburgh which has so much of his work.

Thank you so much, Sir. We are delighted, we are
honoured and you have filled us with happy memories.
